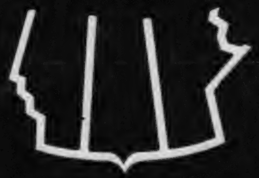

CANADIAN PLAINS REPORTS • 2

SEAS OF EARTH

JILL M. ROBINSON

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SEAS OF EARTH

An Annotated Bibliography of Saskatchewan Literature as it Relates to the Environment

---

compiled and annotated by JILL M. ROBINSON

CANADIAN PLAINS REPORTS ■ 2
L. G. CROSSMAN, GENERAL EDITOR OF OCCASIONAL PUBLICATIONS

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'The true peace of God,' says Conrad, 'begins anywhere a thousand miles from land.' But there are seas of earth as well as of water, and I think Conrad might concede that the spirit whose dwelling is the light of setting suns may be felt as intensely in the middle of the Estevan plains . . . as on the farthest reach of ocean.

(Edward McCourt, *Saskatchewan*, p.38)

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PREFACE

This book is a bibliography of literary works written by approximately one hundred authors. Jill Robinson, who compiled the list and wrote the annotations, has made no attempt to offer us in these pages a complete catalogue of Saskatchewan authors. Rather, she has selected works in which the authors have dealt, implicitly or explicitly, with environmental themes--works in which the writers have shown more than a casual interest in (and insight into) how people react to the peculiarities of the plains.

There is an old saying that the land shapes the people. Because the land and the wind and the weather are constantly with us, we sometimes lose sight of the influence that these things have upon our day to day life.

Saskatchewan is made up of many environments. These environments have influenced--and have been influenced by--the lives of people who have settled and lived here, not only in recent times but ever since the glaciers retreated many thousands of years ago. Harsh, demanding, stark, extreme--these are but a few of the adjectives that both past and present writers have used in describing the Saskatchewan environment. At least, those aspects of the environment that are related to wind and weather. The caprices of wind and weather have not affected us all in the same way--but they have affected us all in *some* way.

We hope that this book will be both interesting and useful to a wide variety of readers. It will, of course, serve teachers and students who are acquiring a knowledge of prairie literature; but we hope it will be read and used by people whose interest in Saskatchewan writing is not solely (or even mainly) academic.

Bibliographies, after all, are supposed to be useful. If they are also entertaining, as we believe this one to be, that is a welcome bonus. We know that some readers will go through this small book page by page from beginning to end. Others will prefer to use it as a reference book. For both kinds of readers, the Table of Contents and the Index of Authors and Titles (pp. 135-39) will be especially useful. The following brief exercise will show you one way of using the bibliography: turn to page 135 and run your eye down the list of authors and titles. You see that Braithwaite's *Why Shoot the Teacher* is discussed on page 109. Turn to page 109 and read Jill Robinson's comments on the book. If you haven't already read it, borrow the book from the library. Better still, go to the bookstore and buy a copy.

As you read this or any of the other books discussed in the bibliography, compare your reactions to the book with those of the annotator. It is no sin to disagree with her--or to carry her analysis several steps beyond the point where she stopped. As Mark Twain said, it is difference of opinion that makes horse races.

We hope that this bibliography will add to the growing interest in Saskatchewan writing, and that Jill Robinson's annotations will make readers more aware of the Saskatchewan environment, both for its own sake and for its part in shaping the thoughts and behaviour of Saskatchewan people--including those Saskatchewan people who write about us.

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Saskatchewan Department of the
Environment

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Canadian Plains Research Center

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Jill Robinson

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INTRODUCTION

This bibliography of Saskatchewan literature with environmental themes is designed especially as a resource book for high school teachers and students. The idea for the bibliography grew from the belief that literature has an important role to play both in reflecting and in shaping human attitudes towards the natural environment. Students of a particular environment would do well to examine its literature in order to determine human perceptions of that environment. Similarly, students of literature should be aware that authors are often highly sensitive to the interplay between environment and human character. No longer should we assume that an understanding of man's relationship with his environment is achieved solely by the scientist.

Users of the bibliography should be aware of its limitations. Items included are significant Saskatchewan literary works which deal meaningfully with the environment of the Canadian Plains area. These items, which are all readily available in Saskatchewan libraries, are either fictional works (novels, short story collections) or non-fictional works with a strong element of human interest (biographies, accounts of pioneer life, travel books). Because the bibliography is intended as a guide to writings in the Humanities, it does not include works which are purely technical or scientific in scope. Several works within the bibliography have been selected for critical commentary and evaluation on the basis of both literary merit and pertinent environmental themes. These brief critiques are designed to stimulate further reading and research into the human perceptions of the Canadian Plains.

There is no doubt that the literature of the Canadian Plains has shown a greater preoccupation with environment than has the literature of other areas of Canada. Explorers, traders, pioneers, farmers and novelists often record their passionate feelings for the Plains, but seldom is a writer merely indifferent to this environment. The range of attitudes towards the Plains, from fear and hatred to a romantic and sometimes mercenary love, can be explained by both the nature of the topography and the fertility of the land. Many literary works deal with the theme of man victimized by an alien, unfriendly and often hostile environment. In these works man sees himself as an intruder in the flat and barren landscape. He feels mercilessly exposed in a horizontal world which lacks, above all, the shelter, comfort and beauty of hills and trees. The harsh extremes of climate, the unpredictability of weather, the general aridity, along with the uncompanionable, barren surroundings, all contribute to the human sense of oppression and victimization. Some literary works actually suggest the presence of a malevolent force in the environment, a force which may be either indifferent or actively hostile to human endeavour.

A smaller number of literary works develop the theme of man as conqueror of the Plains, as an ecological dominant who perceives the environment only in terms of its material value. In these works, the majority of which are accounts of exploration and homesteading, Saskatchewan is frequently an illusory "promised land" where an ambitious and hard-working man can make a fortune. Occasionally, authors admit that the land is not friendly or beautiful but nonetheless potentially profitable. Many variations of the theme of man as victor persist in modern Saskatchewan writings, where human materialism manifests itself in hunting, extermination, tilling and wasting of land, and, of course, in pollution.

There is a third major theme evident in Saskatchewan literature which is, unfortunately, all too rare. In the works of a few writers such as R. D. Symons, Wallace Stegner and J. Gordon Nelson, man is exhorted to be neither a victim nor an exploiter of the Plains, but a creature of the Plains with the wisdom and humility to learn his true role within the ecological system. These works show a cultivated sensitivity to the Plains--to its ecology, its fragility, its limitations for human use, and its unique beauty (as well as its hostility). The authors advocate, in effect, a life in harmony with the environment, which will both preserve the ecology and greatly enhance the quality of human life. The "solitudes," the "expanse" of the Plains, and the rigours of climate are said to contribute to human qualities of independence, resourcefulness and strength of will. The theme of man as Plains creature and protector is undoubtedly the most attractive of the three themes described here, but it is by no means the most prevalent.

There is much to be learned about the Plains environment from the writings of those who have attempted to explore, settle, harvest, conquer, or simply to live in harmony with the land. Some of the most penetrating insights, however, come from literary artists who strive in their novels and short stories to give form to their vision of man's relationship with the environment. I hope that this bibliography and its commentaries will be a useful guide to the various environmental themes of Saskatchewan literature.

J. R.

EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS

P.L. 71 - Provincial Library, Regina,
Bibliographic Services Division,
1352 Winnipeg Street, Regina, Saskatchewan
(from *Saskatchewan Homecoming '71: A Bibliography*).

P.L. 73 - Provincial Library, Regina,
Bibliographic Services Division,
(from *Saskatchewan History: A Bibliography*).

P.L. 75 - Provincial Library, Regina,
Bibliographic Services Division,
Saskatchewan, A Bibliography (*from* 1972).

Peel - Bruce Peel, *A Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces*,
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955.

A. FICTION

Introduction

Writers of fiction are free to use environment, or setting, in a number of ways: for purposes of realism or symbolism; to create an emotional tone; or thematically, to explore how man lives in the natural world. In this latter case, Plains writers tend to see man less as a predator, exploiting the land for selfish ends, and more as a victim of a harsh environment.

The four authors whose novels and short stories are analyzed here have quite individual approaches to the same Plains setting. Of the four, the most sympathetic towards the Plains is W. O. Mitchell, who sees, for example, the prairie Dust-bowl as a challenge to man's spirit; when the environment seems overpowering, the fault is most often with human weaknesses. More important, Mitchell's positive tone emerges notably as the climate and land function as symbols of universal truth for his characters. Sinclair Ross, on the other hand, sees the Plains environment as either hostile or indifferent to human life. Man, victimized by nature, needs human comfort which tragically is not often forthcoming within a repressed society. A similar melancholy flows throughout the novels of Edward McCourt, primarily because man is out of tune with himself, with his community and with the environment. McCourt's protagonists are frequently lost and depressed, their weaknesses pitilessly exposed on the vast expanse of the Plains, and they tend to project their despondency onto the environment. The resulting effect is cheerless indeed. By contrast, Paul Hiebert's satire not only exposes human foibles but also allows the reader to laugh at an environment which Hiebert sees as truly bleak and inhospitable. This comic vision is very rare in Plains literature.

Readers should note that items included here (and elsewhere throughout the bibliography) are arranged alphabetically.

Hiebert, Paul. *Sarah Binks*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1947 (also in McClelland and Stewart's "New Canadian Library" series, #44, 1964).

No one should read *Sarah Binks* as a serious discussion of the Plains environment. Now a classic of Canadian literature, Paul Hiebert's dead-pan presentation of the Life and Works of Sarah Binks--"the Sweet Songstress of Saskatchewan"--is a brilliant satire on the pomposities of literary criticism and of a sentimental brand of poetry which romanticizes the mundane and the colourless. Yet surprisingly, the book's satire is based on an underlying vision of the Plains environment and of Saskatchewan farm life. Sarah's poetry is hilarious precisely because of the unmistakable gulf between subject and poetic form--because the Saskatchewan landscape, climate, and rural life are simply *not* the stuff of the high-flown romantic versifying which is Sarah's forte.

In his "Dedication" and "Introduction," Hiebert stresses the importance of the Prairie environment for Sarah; for her, all was magnificent, inspiring, even the "dazzling alkali flat" and "misty pastels of spreading-time" (p. vi). Her work exudes confidence and joy in her native prairie, and in poems such as "The Song of the Chore," "The Farmer Is King!" and "Ode To a Deserted Farm," Sarah sings the praises of simple rustic life on the Plains. In all, Sarah and her biographer manage to embellish and glamourize an environment and a people which, Hiebert suggests, are not up to the glitter. The book reminds us, with a wit and light-heartedness rare in Saskatchewan literature, that the Plains can be in fact rather dull, uninspiring, and at times decidedly unpleasant--not the stuff out of which romantic poetry is made. For Sarah's (and Hiebert's) view of the Plains environment, one can do no better that to quote from Sarah herself, who never lost "her joy in the sweet simplicity of the Saskatchewan scene":

Paul Hiebert

Photograph by Dave Novak

Granaries near Craven

"Song To the Four Seasons"

Spring is here, the breezes blowing,
Four inches of top-soil going, going;
Farm ducks rolling across the prairie;
Spring is here--how nice and airy!

Summer has come, the hoppers are back,
The sun shines bright, the fields shine black,
Cloudlets gather, it looks like rain--
Ah, the patter of hail on the window pane!

Bounteous harvest, we'll sell at cost--
Tomorrow we'll have an early frost;
Glorious autumn, red with rust;
We'll live on the general store on trust.

A long, quiet winter with plenty of snow,
And plenty of barley; it's eighty below,
Barley in the heater, salt pork in the pantry--
How nice that you never feel cold in this country.

(p. 66)

Hiebert at times allows us to have a good laugh at the expense of Saskatchewan; however, he is also capable of making us see our own follies.

Hiebert, Paul. *Willows Revisited.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967.

This work, the sequel to *Sarah Binks* and written in the same vein, brings together a motley group of poets known as the Saskatchewan School of Seven, who, in recognition of Canada's hundredth birthday, introduce the "Poem of the Month" Centennial Project. The climax comes when these poets gather in Willowview Cemetery to read their poems in honour of Sarah beside her grave. (P.L. 71)

Like *Sarah Binks, Willows Revisited* is a satire on pompous poets, critics, and the "literati," as well as politicians and other absurdities. Like its predecessor, the work also comments indirectly on the Plains environment, which is somehow not up to the glowing tributes of Saskatchewan poets. For example, there is Purge Potatok's moving "Dis Land of Mine" and Osiris Jones-Jones's "To A Gowpher" (which sounds suspiciously like a poem by Robert Burns). In "Lake Washkaboola," the poet unabashedly praises the true wonders of a Saskatchewan lake:

> Here nature casts aside her old disguise,
> Revealing treasures seldom city known--
> Hornets, mosquitoes, spiders, leeches, flies,
> And a thousand jewelled beetles all her own.
>
> (p. 121)

The work includes several poems on birds, few of which are actually found in Saskatchewan. It also includes a brilliant satirical piece on politics and pollution, in "Moonlight on Wascana Lake":

> Be still, oh Lake, be still Wascana's wave,
> Nor lap these picnic bottles to their rest,
> Sound not harsh note of sardine tin, nor lave
> The empty ice-cream cartons to thy breast.
>
> (p. 32)

Willows Revisited is essential reading for all devotees of Sarah's brand of poetry and Hiebert's brand of wit. In part, it allows us to laugh at a land and climate which, in our saner moments, would probably make us cry.

McCourt, Edward A. *The Ettinger Affair* (also titled *Fasting Friar*).
London: Macdonald & Co., 1963.

This is one of McCourt's "university" novels and is, in some ways, rather specialized and dated for most readers now. The novel seems to be an off-shoot of the repressive time of the Fifties and early Sixties, when McCarthyism and its resultant paranoia threatened intellectual freedom on the campus. *The Ettinger Affair* examines the problems of academic freedom in a small Plains university (possibly modelled on the university in Saskatoon). A professor of English, Paul Ettinger, publishes an explicitly sexual novel and is summarily fired by the narrow and repressive Board of Governors. This event, however, is simply the vehicle for McCourt's true centre of interest--the psychological dilemma of one man who must, as a result of the controversy, either remain an island unto himself or become "involved in mankind."

The protagonist of *The Ettinger Affair*, then, is not Paul Ettinger but Walter Ackroyd, a successful university teacher and scholar but a man essentially embittered and isolated. He survives, he believes, by cultivating loneliness, by deliberately avoiding real relationships with people, and by living vicariously through literature and the impersonal rewards of scholarship. However, he is also a man of principle and one who is aware of the terrible limitations of his lifestyle. Throughout the novel he is depicted as oppressed by loneliness and fears which he cannot explain, but which are repeatedly linked to the vast Plains which surround the little town. McCourt uses the Plains setting to develop a distinct, rather simplistic, pattern of psychological symbolism which objectifies the inner life of the main character. For Ackroyd, the Plains and the empty sky suggest all that he finds fearful and threatening in life: exposure of his true being to others; the terrors of utter loneliness; the absence of sheltering, protective psychological walls. Shelter is repeatedly associated with the greystone walls of the campus or with the walls of his tiny apartment, while loneliness and fear are linked to the endless Plains which surround him like a void. As Ackroyd finds himself irretrievably involved in the Ettinger affair and, more importantly because he is in love with the selfish Paul Ettinger's wife, he must gradually leave his safe but sterile walls and face the joys and the terrors of freedom--symbolized by the Plains environment.

As the affair between Ackroyd and Marion Ettinger develops into a mature and vital love-relationship, the Plains setting and its symbolic significance become more prominent. At first, Ackroyd had felt "defenceless and exposed" merely walking towards the university gates in the sunlight (p. 81). With Marion, he makes a decidedly symbolic journey into the country, where the ambivalent Plains environment reflects concretely the dual nature of Ackroyd's loss of psychological "walls." When Marion (one of McCourt's most refreshingly individualistic and intelligent females) suggests the delights of running across open prairie, Ackroyd literally flinches. He admits that, by temperament, he "was made for the cloistered life" (p. 134). Although for Marion the prairie is lovely and compelling, Ackroyd feels its sinister quality, "as if there's nothing between you and all the evil in the universe" (p. 134). Ackroyd clearly projects his fears into the environment; however, he eventually confronts the terrors of the Plains in order to embrace life itself.

The May landscape, with its greenness, flowers, and full lakes, should be appropriately romantic for the lovers; however, for Ackroyd the beauty of the Plains is illusory. The lake they visit is depressingly deserted, a "dead sea that had no history, no associations to give it life" (p. 132). The entire landscape suggests the main character's joyless vision of life:

> The landscape was all wrong for a fine spring morning. It was lonely, infinitely sad; and the few evidences of life were symbolic of man's pathetic search for joy in a world where no joy dwelt. Man corrupted whatever he touched.
> (p. 132)

Yet, paradoxically, Ackroyd *does* find beauty in the wasteland, just as he does in life. He and Marion drive to a secluded ridge above the lakeshore which is backed by deep ravines full of shrubbery, poplars, and flowers--a little environment which has a lushness and variety not associated with the Plains. However, his awareness of this natural beauty is tempered by knowledge of the coming dryness, which will transform the scene to ugliness. Similarly, Ackroyd views human relationships as empty and fruitless for the most part, with only the barest hope for true joy and companionship. Yet, in the midst of treachery on all sides of the Ettinger affair, Ackroyd discovers a warm, caring human being who ends his loneliness.

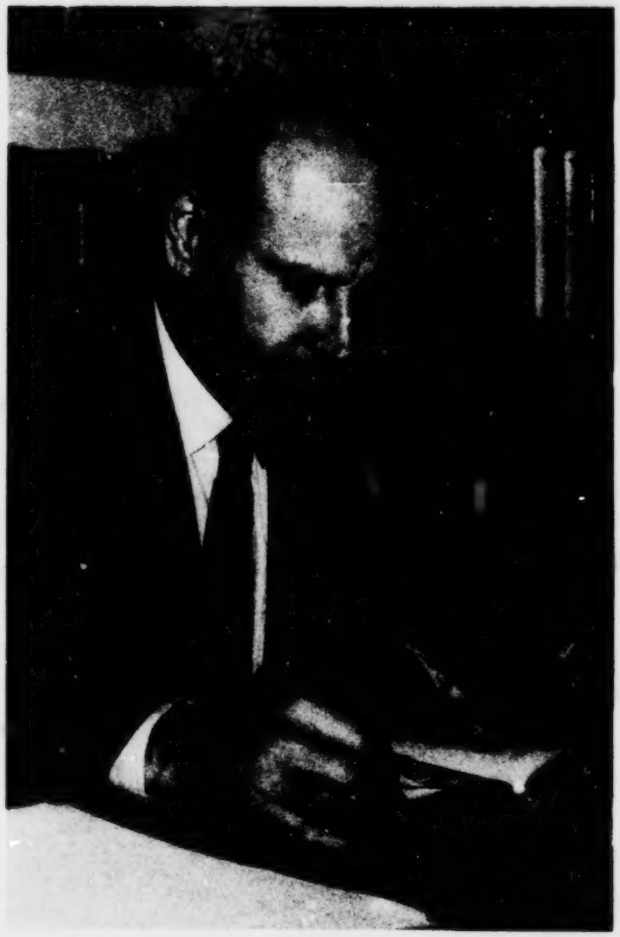
Ackroyd's attempts to intervene in the Ettinger affair in order, he believes, to preserve intellectual freedom, result in devastating disillusionment on every side. He himself fights the bigoted University President not with logic or justification of principle, but with the jungle tactic of blackmail. At Ackroyd's expense, Paul Ettinger is reinstated on the faculty, only to resign for a more lucrative post elsewhere. And it appears that Marion will leave with her husband to avoid the bother of scandal and divorce. In the end, Ackroyd is even evicted by his narrow-minded landlady and is about to become again the "fasting friar doomed to wander through the world always alone," having lost love and faith in mankind (p. 217). However, in a romantic turnabout ending, Ackroyd returns to Marion and they flee together joyously. Together they walk to the edge of the prairie and, for the first time, Ackroyd finds he can look at the "great void" of the Plains and "the remote, indifferent stars" and feel at peace. McCourt's carefully structured pattern of symbolism culminates in this final act of hope.

The Ettinger Affair, despite a traditional happy ending, is somewhat disturbing in its brooding despondency, its deadening sense of futility. Man here is portrayed as a victim of both environmental and human forces, and he seems to have little hope of improving his lot unless he aggressively snatches what fleeting beauty he can. Like most of McCourt's novels, this book presents a profoundly melancholy view of man's place in the world.

McCourt, Edward A. *Home Is the Stranger*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1950.

Though not one of McCourt's better-known novels, *Home is the Stranger* is certainly his most important novel in terms of its comment on the Plains environment. It is the story of an Irish war bride, Norah Armstrong, who willingly leaves the beautiful Antrim countryside to settle with her husband on the Saskatchewan Plains. The story of Norah's devastating struggle to come to terms with a land which, for her, is not only unfamiliar but actively hostile, is a vehicle for the most thorough study of environment in Saskatchewan fiction. In this novel McCourt explores above all the psychological effects of the Plains environment on a sensitive and vulnerable character who must ultimately learn the meaning of inner strength and self-knowledge through her conflict with land and climate.

Like many of McCourt's protagonists, Norah tends to be somewhat romantic and lacking in a clear and strong set of values by which to guide her behaviour. Before she leaves the lovely Irish countryside, with its seascape, its green hills and glens, its colourful variety, she is warned by her future husband of the difficulties she will face in the alien environment of the Plains. She finds that she is unable to imagine "the loneliness of unbroken space, of mile upon mile of field and road and field drawing away. . . to an horizon distant beyond reckoning" (p. 8), and she unrealistically insists that her love for her husband, Jim, is sufficient to overcome the effects of alienation in a strange environment. And although she cannot grasp Jim's statement that "People aren't everything," she is later to repeat these words with conviction when she lives on the Plains. McCourt stresses here the profound effects of conditioning on the individual: Norah, raised in an environment of green and companionable hills, is almost destroyed by her inability to adapt to the Plains.



Edward McCourt

Photograph by Brian Schneider

Abandoned farm house, near Lumsden

The Plains setting of *Home Is the Stranger* is clearly the antagonistic force in the novel, and emerges as an element more important than any character other than Norah herself. The novel abounds in descriptions of the land and climate, such as the long and highly sensitive picture in Chapter 2 of the land's immensity and lack of contour, the patterns of colour across the landscape, the blue dome of sky, the minute signs of human life in farms and villages, the wind and dust. Later there are vivid descriptions (seen from the viewpoint of the main character) of the devastated, drought-stricken landscape in summer, of violent wind and rain storms, of the momentary serenity of autumn and of the monotonous grey-white world of winter on the Plains. While Norah's husband struggles to produce a crop in the harsh but familiar land, Norah struggles inwardly against feelings of alienation and terror. It is above all the lack of "companionable," protective surroundings which ultimately threatens Norah and exposes her weakness. She discovers her need for shelter and protection, initially in the safety of four walls, and finally in a desperate human alliance which results in the tragic death of her young son and very nearly in her own destruction.

In the novel's powerful crisis Norah and her ailing child are totally isolated in their farm-house during a violent winter blizzard which lasts for several days. The effects of constant wind and cold, coupled with her complete isolation even from neighbours, increase her sense of paranoia and fatalism. She imagines an evil force in the environment which seeks her destruction:

> She seemed now to see in the shape of things a deliberateness of intention actuated by malice and directed against herself and all men living in the vast vacuity of the Prairies. It was as if the indifferent forces of nature were not indifferent at all; they were fighting back against man's intrusion . . . . (p. 187)

The wind becomes an archetypal image of the environment's hatred for Norah and for all men. In her terror and loneliness, Norah turns weakly to Brian Malory, also an Irish expatriot, who has come after several days with supplies and help. She insists that he stay with her, and their inevitable illicit love affair results in the tragic neglect of her child, Philip, now ill with pneumonia. The adultery and her irresponsible behaviour as a mother seem to mark the total collapse of Norah's courage and moral fibre in a defeat by the environment. Norah had not found within herself the necessary strength and confidence to survive and to protect the helpless. When her child dies, she feels that it is the earth itself which has defeated her and her child. She attempts suicide by exposure and freezing, and sees this desperate act, not as an act of free will but as her final defeat by the Plains environment. In her delirium she imagines that triumphant voices of the land cry out around her.

Norah lives to realize some important truths--primarily, that her true sin had been fear, and that, in order to survive, she must find strength within herself and in human love "to make terms with the earth itself" (p. 268). In a final gesture of courage, she overcomes her ecstatic longing to move to the more companionable environment of the west coast and insists that they remain on the Plains which her husband loves. This decision may seem unrealistic in the light of Norah's earlier tragic weakness, but it marks the protagonist's essential victory over the uncontrollable forces of the earth. Nevertheless, *Home Is the Stranger* leaves one with the feeling that the forces of environment and climate on the Plains are more awesome and powerful than the efforts of man to resist them.

McCourt, Edward A. *Music at the Close*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966 (1st edition: Ryerson Press, 1947).

McCourt's best-known novel, *Music at the Close*, his first to be published in the New Canadian Library paperback series, is set mainly on the Saskatchewan Plains in the period between the two world wars. It is a bleak but moving story of human alienation, of struggle and failure, and of a fruitless search for values in a barren land. The prairie setting of the novel is a major factor in the development of these themes and of the character of the protagonist, Neil Fraser.

As Allan Bevan observes in his useful introduction to the novel, Neil Fraser is one of the "Lost Generation" of prairie dwellers following the first World War. His life lacks the sureness of purpose evident in pioneer society and is characterized, above all, by a futile struggle for fulfilment. Orphaned as a young boy, Neil is sent from Ontario to a farm on the Saskatchewan Plains, an environment which he perceives at first as immensely monotonous and lonely, at times even terrifying. His earliest reaction to the environment is fear--of "a curiously sinister quality" about the turgid Saskatchewan River (p. 17), of the "immensity of darkness," and of the lonely wail of a coyote during the prairie night. The predominantly negative images of the Plains setting in this novel should not be dismissed as unrealistic and distorted: they serve to reflect and, in part, to explain Neil's confusion and loneliness. Because the novel is essentially limited to the protagonist's point of view, descriptions of the environment and the atmosphere they engender suggest Neil's state of mind.

Throughout the novel, Neil is very much a man alone and spiritually lost on the Plains. Because he is alienated from both his social and natural environment, his life seems to be a sequence of futile efforts to fill the void in which he exists and to give meaning to his life. As a child--orphaned, uprooted from his home--he establishes a pattern of solitariness and escapes from the dull reality of prairie farm life through romantic literature. He sees clearly the helplessness and disillusionment of the wheat farmer who is subject to an indifferent and unpredictable environment. In summer, his uncle's crop is threatened by furious heat and thunderstorms; in harvest time, a bumper crop is virtually ruined by sudden frost. Neil's uncle Matt no longer believes in a "promised land" or even in "next year," and he and his wife seem doomed to the drudgery and routine of bare survival. Neil is also aware of the purely materialistic motives of many post-war immigrants to the Plains.

> No one spoke of staying in Pine Creek. "The Coast" was the goal of almost every family in the district. There, after he had made his pile, the farmer planned to retire to a balmy climate, trees that grew in abundance, and pastures that never dried up. The Promised Land lay just across the mountain ranges. But first there was a fortune to be made in Pine Creek. (p. 54)

Thus, Neil's disenchantment with life on the Plains is nurtured in his boyhood.

Unable to find joy in the land, in his uncle's life-work, or in lasting human fellowship, Neil turns more and more inward and thrives on romantic dreams and on hero-worship. He envisages himself as lone intellectual, romantic lover, scholar, novelist, master farmer and, finally, war hero. In reality, Neil's story is one of failure and disillusionment in everything he tries, until he finally abandons his search for meaning in life. Much of this failure is caused by his own lack of faith in mankind and in himself; however, the protagonist's dilemma can also be linked to his vision of man's dreary and hopeless struggle for survival on the Saskatchewan Plains.

After his own crushing disappointment at University, Neil returns to the farm upon his uncle's death and is overwhelmed with the futility of the man's life:

> He had dreamed his dreams ... and he had lived eighty years--for what? His life had been one unremitting round of hard work, of self-denial, of striving against the forces of nature. (p. 131)

For Neil, the struggle which results only in drab survival is pointless. He is able to see the beauty possible in his uncle's love of the land, admitting that "it was no small thing to be on intimate terms with the earth itself..." (p. 132). Yet Neil himself does not achieve this joy when he takes over the farm, absorbed as he is in grandiose dreams of quick riches which will free him to write. The climate does not co-operate; he recklessly disregards the growth of weeds; and though he does have a surprisingly good harvest, he gambles and loses almost everything in the collapse of the stock-market. Neil's failure here is evidenced by a disrespect for the land and by greed; from this point on, his tragic decline is accelerated.

When Neil begins his lonely pilgrimage across the Plains with the rootless and the unemployed, he is at first fascinated by the prairie scene from his train window, a scene compared to the sea as "awe-inspiring in its colossal monotony" (p. 148). However, after his crucial confrontation with the violence and injustice of men, when a clash of police and striking miners results in the death of Neil's only friend, his despairing attitude towards life is reflected in his increasing indifference to the environment. Overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of life, he no longer notices the land (p. 163) and is incapable of responding to its particular beauty because "his mood was not attuned to his environment" (p. 165).

Ironically, Neil returns with his new wife to the farm and to a way of life which holds no interest for him. His bitterness, his belief that the future is now only "drab and depressing" (unlike his dreams) is reflected in descriptions of the dismal setting: the farm itself neglected and the buildings weather-beaten; snowdrifts high in the pathless yard; the "grey, melancholy dusk" (pp. 172-73). Neil's despair is intensified when he becomes absorbed in the same futile struggle with the land which he had witnessed in his uncle. He is oppressed by drought--its heat, dust and wind--and watches his crops shrivel and die year after year. Moreover, Neil attributes his hopeless plight solely to the hostile environment:

> And everywhere the dust lay in a thick grey film--dust that filtered in under the windows ... seemingly out of the very walls themselves. And it would always be like this--always the unrelenting struggle against an environment that was either too hot or too cold, or dusty or muddy, but never equable, never kindly. (p. 183)

However, even Neil's wife is aware that more than the cruelty of drought is involved in his dilemma. He must face the reality of his own failure, which involves in part a reckless exploitation of the land. In four years he hasn't got rid of a single weed; his land is neglected, improperly cultivated (p. 185). Neil's personal failure seems to be complete when he loses his wife's love and abandons any attempt to find fulfilment as a writer.

The war offers Neil a final, tragic escape from the Plains environment and from his own failure to find meaning there. He sees how, "in a world that was drab, oppressive, hopeless, war and war alone had something worthwhile to offer"--security, excitement, release from the deadening struggle for survival (pp. 214-15). And he comes to dread returning to the farm, to a monotonous struggle which for him holds no joy and no hope. His lonely death on the battlefield marks the final, inevitable futility of Neil's life.

In its exploration of man's dreary alienation not only from other men but also from the land itself, *Music at the Close* is one of the most disenchanted novels to come from the Plains. The novel also dramatizes the terrible malaise of a whole society--the generation of prairie people between the wars--when farmers already demoralized by the Depression desperately ravaged the land for meagre profits. Neil Fraser is not simply a helpless victim of uncontrollable forces, of "the raw power of his environment," as Allan Bevan believes (p. 11); he is also a victim of himself, of his own human weakness. He is unable or unwilling to find either meaning or beauty in the real Plains environment, and seeks these things in romantic dreams. Yet he exploits the land, first for quick riches, and later in a reckless struggle for marginal existence. In doing so he contributes to the destruction of both himself and the environment. It is important to realize that the unsympathetic attitude towards the Plains in this novel emanates from the thoughts and actions of its main character. He is a man who fails to understand the essential human values of faith in mankind and faith in the natural world.

McCourt, Edward A. *Walk Through the Valley*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1959.

In this gripping story of Michael Troy, a fourteen-year-old boy growing up on the edge of the Saskatchewan Cypress Hills during the period following Prohibition, the author explores the process of maturation. The reader is presented, in effect, with Michael's innocent and rather romantic viewpoint as he gradually realizes that his father's many forays into the Hills are, in fact, part of an ill-fated bootlegging racket. Like several of McCourt's protagonists, Michael tends to be a dreamer, his adolescent imagination excited by his reading, by the legendary environment of the Hills, and by the mysterious and ultimately tragic series of events which impinge on his life. Michael's illusions are gradually and dramatically destroyed as he watches the insidious undermining of his family life by his father's misguided adventures.

The Cypress Hills setting of *Walk Through the Valley* allows McCourt to deal with his favourite Saskatchewan landscape, one which he claims in his travel-book *Saskatchewan*, exerts an inexplicable and powerful spell over him. In the story of Michael Troy, the setting is precisely where the Great Plains meet the high plateau of the Hills, and these contrasting landscapes contribute to both the realism and the symbolism of the novel. Descriptions of the natural environment are plentiful and often detailed, and serve, in part, to reflect concretely aspects of Michael's character and of the novel's theme.

The flat and barren Plains on which the Troy farm is situated are associated with the grim realities of survival and particularly with the dullness and monotony of life. Fearing drought, Michael resents the prairie environment in which "the profits of his labour were day by day shrivelling under the relentless, stupefying blaze of sunlight that streamed like molten lava, on the earthbound crops" (p. 11). As elsewhere in McCourt's fiction the Plains, in their effects on man, are compared to the sea--"especially in fall when they were grey all over" (p. 92)--and to the desert. For Michael, the Plains suggest the drab areas of life's struggle: he sees how the sustained heat and dryness turn the rich green of spring to grey and brown and yellow; how the crops wither and yellow before their time; how the sky hangs with a grey film threatening dust storms (pp. 141, 157). At the end of the story, his greatest fear is of moving into a town situated on "the dull endless plains that held no surprises, no suggestion of mystery, where you could see all there was to see at a single glance" (p. 216).

The great plateau of the Cypress Hills, however, provides the rich variety lacking on the Plains and, for Michael, is a natural refuge for his lively spirit and his dreams. He frequently retreats to the plateau to live out his romantic boyish adventures in poplar groves, along the creeks, in densely wooded coulees, or in the pine forests of the uplands. He is strongly influenced by his father, Dermot Troy, who compares the hill country to his native Ireland and endows it with legend and mystery. When Dermot speaks of moving to a homestead in the hills, he is excited by the prospects of increased rainfall for his crops; but he is even more excited by the "variety of all kinds" (p. 133) in the natural landscape. Tragically, Dermot escapes the dullness of prairie farm life by joining a rum-runner in the Hills, and lives out a brief fantasy of adventure and freedom. His meaningless death signifies the end of all childhood illusions for Michael. In the end Michael must accept the move from the edge of the Hills to the town, beyond which lie, "as far as the eye could see, only the drab grey fields, no alleviating touch of colour anywhere, running at last to merge with a drab grey sky at the very limit of human sight" (p. 217).

Walk Through the Valley can be read as an adventure story which engenders considerable suspense, or as an historical novel reflecting the troubled times after Prohibition. It is, above all, a subtle and sometimes melancholy study of maturation and the inevitable process of disillusionment. The contrasting Saskatchewan landscapes presented in the novel effectively symbolize the dreams and the struggles of the central character, and harmonize with his state of mind. In his fiction McCourt often presents the Saskatchewan Plains as inimical to the human spirit; here he balances this view with the sense of freedom and adventure which Michael experiences on the high plateau.

McCourt, Edward. *The Wooden Sword*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1956.

Considered to be one of McCourt's finest novels, *The Wooden Sword* is at once a poignant and suspenseful study of psychological tragedy resulting from war. Steven Venner, a university teacher of English in a Saskatchewan city (modelled on Saskatoon), struggles daily with unknown subconscious horrors which go back to his war experiences with the Eighth Army in North Africa, and eventually to his bitterly unhappy childhood. His teaching career, his relationships with friends and colleagues, and most importantly, his marriage, are being slowly destroyed by the war trauma and resultant fears which he cannot control. In the novel's carefully constructed and very dramatic plot we glimpse his terrifying paranoia and depression, his efforts to piece together both his past and his shattered present, and his final heroic reliving of the traumatic events in order to be free of them.

Throughout the novel McCourt successfully uses landscape descriptions to reflect and to make tangible the inner wasteland of Steven Venner's personality. Venner seems obsessed at times with the Canadian Plains environment, which he continually compares to the great deserts of North Africa somewhat, he observes, as one might compare a third-rate copy to a great work of art. Venner's attitudes towards the Plains can be understood only in psychological terms, insofar as the Plains remind him of his desert war trauma or are linked to his present unhappiness. Although the prairie is physically like the desert with which he is infatuated, it is monotonous, colourless and, above all, full of associations with death:

> The prairie was like the desert in its flatness, its immensity, its color at a time like this, but there

> was no real, no significant resemblance. ...No one understood him when he said the prairie was without life. People lived on the prairie, of course, more people than lived on the desert, where you could travel hundreds of miles and see no living thing. But people didn't mean life necessarily. It was the way they lived, how long they lived, that mattered. (pp. 14-15)

The point suggested here is that Venner's present life is deadened from within, and this death-in-life is subconsciously projected by him onto the environment of the Plains. For example, when he speaks of the autumn scene along the Saskatchewan river or of winter on the Plains, his morbid imagery reflects his own fear of inner death. At other times, the physical features of the Plains remind him of the desert and the horrors of war, arousing in him feelings of inexplicable terror.

His perception of the desert landscape of his past is equally ambiguous. On one level, the desert is clearly associated by Venner with a romantic dream-world of Biblical prophets, great acts of heroism, the timeless mysteries of an ancient land which "stirred the blood and compelled the dullest imagination to life" (p. 16). By contrast, the prairie is a land of no mystique, where "drab men lived drab lives" (p. 17) and where Venner has no chance of happiness until he exorcises past traumas from his mind. The strongly psychological reasons for his attraction to the desert emerge as he and his psychiatrist unravel the influence of his childhood on his later life. It seems that Venner had identified the desert lands with a romantic world where all would be happiness, by contrast with the unhappiness of his early environment, unhappiness which he associated with hills and valleys and so forth (p. 189). Venner eventually recalls the physical and mental abuse he received as a child from his father for the "sin of cowardice" (p. 66); in one instance, he was cruelly forced to ride a toboggan down terrifying hills in order to prove his courage. The lasting influence of early childhood experiences on the human perception of environment is clearly dramatized here. Though the desert became Venner's dream-world in fantasy and, later, his *real* world during the war, he proved unable to live up to its ideal of glamorous heroics. In the novel's climax, Venner must torturously relive his great act of cowardice during the war, an act which he believes cost the lives of many men who critically depended on him for leadership.

The Wooden Sword is especially readable for its intriguing and close-knit plot which traces both the inner and external struggles of its protagonist. While on the surface we see the deterioration of Steven Venner as scholar, teacher, social being and husband, we may also follow his psychological battle to rebuild his personality and thus his life. His fears, his dreams, and his sense of a present death-in-life existence are reflected concretely through the many references to environment--both of the Canadian Plains and the African deserts. These real landscapes, seen from the main character's point of view, are never merely a realistic backdrop for the novel's action, but provide a symbolic parallel for the nightmarish inner landscape of Venner's mind. The development of the plot towards the protagonist's remarkable recovery from trauma and a shattered life suggests an optimism which is seldom found in McCourt's writing. Though it perhaps lacks the depth of *Music at the Close*, *The Wooden Sword* is a more absorbing novel and spiritually more appealing.

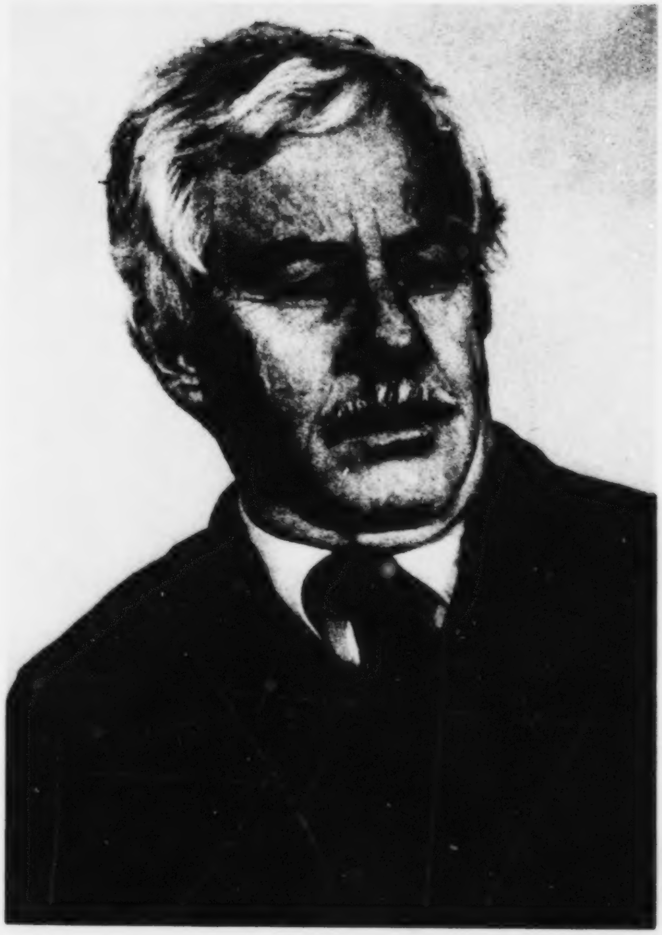
Mitchell, W. O. *Jake and the Kid.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1961.

This series of thirteen episodes in the life of a young boy and his hero was originally a very popular radio serial, delighting thousands of Canadians with stories that were sometimes moving, often humorous. The stories centre on the unique relationship between the kid, a boy of 12 or so, and Jake, the crotchety and down-to-earth farmhand on the kid's mother's farm near Crocus, Saskatchewan. Included in the stories are an assortment of small-town characters, some of them eccentric, most of them recognizable types. The action and the Plains setting are all viewed through the eyes and the understanding of the kid, who proves to be a most effective narrator. He is still relatively innocent and open to experience, and has a lively imagination which results in vivid and sensuous descriptions of the environment.

Though the prairie setting is subordinate to characterization and human events in this work, it is nonetheless presented with sympathy and great clarity. In the first story the kid responds to the aliveness of spring on the Plains and almost forgets his momentary depression:

> Outside was spring everywhere, with a warm chinook whispering along our poplar windbreak stirring our windmill to creaking. Out on the prairie a million frogs in their sloughs set the soft night singing to beat anything. The whole darn bald-headed prairie was alive with spring, and I wished I was dead. (p. 3)

This description is effective because of the use of the boy's viewpoint, which involves his particular sensitivity combined with his use of the vernacular and his boyish imagery. For the two main characters the Plains are largely a source of life and of goodness even in times of drought.



W. O. Mitchell

Photograph by James J. Lisitza

An Aspen stand

In one episode two neighbours of Jake and the kid engage in a heated debate over the effects of the Plains on those who live there. Through this dialogue, Mitchell's own positive attitudes towards this environment emerge clearly. One embittered character attacks the Plains as unfit for human life and claims that this land makes people "Queer" from the loneliness. In a strong rebuttal his opponent attacks those who come to the Plains only for material gain and are thus incapable of appreciating the special beauty of the environment. He also suggests that their greed is responsible for the improper farming techniques which destroyed much prairie farmland during the thirties:

> You'r like a lot of other folks that come to make a stake outa the prairie and get out as fast as you can. It's people like you give her a dry, cracked face with hot winds rollin' tumbleweed over. (p. 28)

He goes on to express his love for the often-hated topography of the Plains--the flatness, the expanse, the great land and sky--as well as for aspects of this environment which make it unique--the meadow lark's song, clear well water, prairie mornings, the smell of wolf willow, the sound of the coyote. In this episode Mitchell has dramatically presented the powerful love-hate feelings of Plains people for their environment, and has suggested the importance of an open and positive attitude.

Other stories present sensitive renderings of the environment and climate. The kid describes in vivid terms the bitter hostility of a winter blizzard. Later, he provides a beautiful description of "old Mac's coulee" in spring, for him a private and sensuous little world of his own. Because of the immediacy of his viewpoint, he can convey his closeups of feathery wild oats, crocuses, tumbleweeds and other features of the coulee. Jake also provides a memorable view of the Plains, particularly in his delightfully exaggerated stories to the kid of stampeding buffalo and "mud blizzards." During a terrible July drought, Jake makes a "rain-machine" which actually appears to work! His highly imaginative and unique image of drought on the Plains is one of the most memorable passages in the book:

> All over the prairie where the sloughs use to be, little puffs a dust where the frogs was jumpin. You'd see a frog jump, there'd be a plop a dust, then you' see him swimmin the way a frog does--underdust swimmin' .... (p. 150)

Jake and the Kid has been accepted as a classic of Saskatchewan literature primarily because of the realistic and moving relationship between a boy and a man which lies at the centre of these stories. It is also important because the positive qualities which nourish that relationship are evident also in their love of the Plains environment. The Plains is basically a good place to live, a good place to grow, a good place to become a man.

Mitchell, W. O. *Who Has Seen the Wind*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1947.

W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* is probably the best known and best loved novel written in and about Saskatchewan, and it is already considered a classic of Plains literature. In 1976 it was made into a full-length movie, produced by Alan King of Toronto and filmed on location in Arcola, Saskatchewan. The appeal of this novel seems to stem from the timeless simplicity of its subject--the growth of a boy to maturity--and from its basically sympathetic view of the Plains as an environment which nurtures such growth. The author defines the novel's theme in a brief preface:

> In this story I have tried to present sympathetically the struggle of a boy to understand what still defeats mature and learned men--the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life. To him are revealed in moments of fleeting vision the realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death.

To convey his theme Mitchell uses the most prevailing natural phenomenon of the Plains--the wind--as a distinctive and wholly apt symbol of the mysteries of human life and ultimately of the Divine. In many ways the story is a parable of the human quest for God.

The novel's main character is Brian O'Connal, a boy between the ages of four and fourteen who lives with his parents, younger brother and grandmother in a small Saskatchewan town. Brian's boyish spontaneity and sensitivity, his curiosity and vitality, make him highly receptive to experience and to the Plains environment which surrounds him. In the early chapters, the small boy's fears and, in particular, his loneliness, are reflected by the emptiness of the prairie and by the keening wind, "a frightening and lonely sound, fading into nothingness" (p. 20). Yet he is drawn to the prairie and to the sense of release and freedom which it imparts, a freedom which Brian sees manifested within the remarkable Young Ben. Most importantly, it is almost exclusively on the prairie that Brian experiences an intense "explosion of feeling," a rare moment of elation in which he feels fully alive. This moment of pure joy is brought on by such natural experiences as that of the prairie scene itself, a crow calling, the smells of leaf mold and clover, wolf willow, and above all, the wind. However, that exquisite exultation which Brian seeks becomes increasingly difficult to attain, and gives way at times to feelings of futility and melancholy.

As Brian matures, the environment increasingly reflects the negative elements of life. The fierce winter wind becomes a terrifying threat as Brian identifies it with his fear of God's vengeance. When he and his friends go on a gruesome expedition to drown gophers, he discovers the indifference of the Plains to individual suffering and death. Brian feels there must be a supernatural being somehow immanent, solemn, and unmoved by the cycle of birth and death:

> Prairie's awful, thought Brian, and in his mind there loomed vaguely fearful images of a still and brooding spirit, a quiescent power unsmiling from everlasting to everlasting to which the coming and passing of the prairie's creatures was but incidental. (p. 128)

The mystery of mortality is further dramatized when Brian buries his dog on the prairie (which becomes a concrete symbol of the biblical "dust unto dust"), and above all when, in the novel's climax, his father falls ill and dies. At this point, overwhelmed by the prairie's stillness and "frightening emptiness" (p. 255), Brian senses the terrible vulnerability of human beings as compared to the unchanging Plains. After his father's death, Brian is drawn to the lonely prairie, symbol of eternity in contrast to human life. Brian's final question in the novel--"Why did people die?... What was the good in being a human?" (p. 298)--is answered, in a way, by the prairie itself. Though individuals are born and die, the cycle of days, nights, seasons, and of life itself on the Plains is timeless and eternal. The wind is seen finally as the great equalizer, as it obscures the signs of life and death in the environment; for Mitchell, the wind is ultimately a symbol of the mystery of eternity.

Aside from its metaphoric functions in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, the environment also figures as a realistic and active element in the novel's plot. The land and climate of the Saskatchewan Plains during the drought of the Thirties are the true antagonistic forces in the novel, destroying crops and obliterating human endeavour. The town's livelihood is seen to depend intrinsically on the success or failure of the crops; for many farmers, the struggle to make the land yield may result in a sense of futility and despair, perhaps in madness. The behaviour of two characters who influence Brian considerably is determined by the prairie environment--his uncle Sean O'Connal, who has the wisdom to denounce farming methods which devastate the land; and Saint Sammy, a lovable but demented old man who went mad after "yearsa gittin' rusted out an' saw flied out an' cutwormed out an' hoppered out an' hailed out an' droughted out an' rusted out an' smutted out" (p. 118). Uncle Sean seems to epitomize the courage, toughness and perseverance of the prairie farmer during the dustbowl years, but eventually his most characteristic mood is the bitter anger which grows with each crop failure, and his most characteristic utterance is a curse. Significantly, Brian, when he stays on his uncle's farm, is disappointed by the crudity and boredom of farm life. Following an incident in which he displays his ineptness in farm work, he is overcome with guilt and resentment, and he flees the countryside for the comforts of home and town.

Saint Sammy is possibly the novel's most memorable character, a sort of crazy John the Baptist in the wilderness of the Saskatchewan Plains. When Brian and two friends go to see him, they find that he lives in a filthy paino box on the "bald-headed prairie," sleeps on binder-twine bits and raw sheep's wool, and speaks in a fantastic mixture of Biblical and prairie idiom. Though mad in the usual sense, he paradoxically seems remakably sane in his oneness with the prairie environment--especially with its "critters" and "the fowla thuh air"--and in his adherence to a simple set of moral values. Moreover, he clearly understands the "sorra an' sighin' over the face of the prairie" (p. 196), which comes with the environmental hazards of drought, cutworm, rust, grasshoppers. His marvellous story of the Creation shows his love for all living things and for the land. Brian discovers that although Saint Sammy is "crazy as a cut calf," he is capable of inspiring Brian with that breathless, passionate feeling of aliveness which he longs to grasp and understand, but cannot.

Two other important characters in Brian's growth are the Ben, who gave up farming for the more profitable business of bootlegging, and Grandmother O'Connal, who provides a link with the pioneer past. In his excellent critical study of the use of landscape in *Who Has Seen the Wind* (see Section F), Carlyle King explains the shiftless Ben's closeness to the environment:

> The Ben has the unmorality of nature; he is as free of conscience as "the prairie wind that lifted over the edges of the prairie world to sing mortality to every living thing." He is also the father of young Ben, who seems to the youthful Brian to be the essence or incarnation of the wildness and the mystery of the prairie. (p. 6)

Shortly before her death Grandmother O'Connal recalls her homesteading days in beautiful sensory detail, even to the honey smell of the wolf willow beside her hut on the prairie. However, her favorite homesteading stories serve to illustrate how the pioneers were frequently in conflict with the Plains environment. One story, which tells how she made a cushion out of the hide of a bobcat killed by her husband, suggests man's irrational sense of predator rivalry, with the enemy in this case literally becoming his "footstool." Other stories--of a tame coyote which was taught to howl in tenor, and of a bear cub raised by a man--also suggest this discord between man and environment. Brian, on the other hand, grows in his understanding of self and of environment to the point where, at age fourteen, he decides to become a "dirt doctor" (p. 295) --to heal the sick prairie of rust, to develop better strains of wheat, in general to promote a healthy and balanced relationship between man and the Plains environment.

Throughout the novel, Mitchell's attitude towards the Plains is almost always positive, as compared, for example, to the often bitter and depressing tone of Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*. Even amidst the devastation of incessant drought, the prairie is seen somewhat sentimentally by Mitchell as a land which builds moral and physical fibre, which makes boys into men. On the literal level, this novel is important for its insights into the varying effects of environment on the mind and imagination of a young boy. On a symbolic level, the ever-present prairie wind in its various moods suggests the life-mysteries which Brian seeks to understand, and provides a concrete parallel for his state of mind. The secondary characters, many of them eccentric but nevertheless influential in Brian's life, provide a wide range of perceptions of the prairie environment. While the novel focuses primarily on the protagonist's encounters with the basic truths of life--birth, hunger, sexuality, fear, death--it also explores his growing awareness of man's place in the natural world. For these reasons *Who Has Seen the Wind* is one of the most important Saskatchewan novels to deal with the Plains environment.

Ross, Sinclair. *As for Me and My House*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967 (1st edition: 1941).

As for Me and My House is now a classic of Saskatchewan fiction and is considered by some to be Canada's greatest novel. However, it is also a bleak and depressing story, and for this reason was neglected by the Canadian public until very recently, when it enjoyed a come-back of sorts. It is a novel about a minister and his wife during one year of their life, and is set in the fictional small town of Horizon, Saskatchewan, in the 1930's. The entire story is presented from the point of view of Mrs. Bentley in the form of her private diary, and is therefore an intimate record of her thoughts and feelings about everything which meaningfully touches her life. She is particularly preoccupied with the Plains environment, for in the year-long cycle of climate and in the vast dimensions of the land, she finds a concrete parallel, almost a symbol, of her inner emotional life. She comments with sensitivity on the desperate struggles of dust-bowl farmers and, more importantly, on the environment which she personally finds spiritually menacing and empty.

The entries in Mrs. Bentley's diary trace the series of conflicts, both inner and external, which torment her. Above all, she longs hopelessly for communication and warmth from her husband, Philip, a frustrated and embittered artist trapped in the hypocritical role of small-town preacher. Throughout the diary she records his coldness and indifference to her, his inability to communicate warmly or to remedy his dead-end life, his final deceit and infidelity. Mrs. Bentley is the epitome of the faithful and devoted wife who has deliberately chosen to live vicariously through her husband. Because she has abandoned her own individuality and depends on her husband for her sense of worth, Mrs. Bentley must re-

Sinclair Ross

Photograph by Dave Novak

Train Station, Fort Qu'Appelle

sort to desperate efforts to win even the smallest sign of approval or affection from him. To add to this, Mrs. Bentley frequently finds herself in conflict with the pettiness and bigotry of Horizon. Her decision to adopt a Roman Catholic boy, for example, is condemned by many of the town's leading citizens. Educated, at one time a promising pianist, she feels stifled by the mores of the small town society which deems how, as minister's wife, she should act and live. However, she must conform to her role for economic reasons and so she represses her bitterness and her true feelings.

Mrs. Bentley's various frustrations have a direct bearing on her perception of the envrionment. Her many comments on the Plains and its climate are realistic but, on the whole, distorted, because they reflect the terrible bleakness of Mrs. Bentley's inner life. The landscape is seen as a wasteland--bleak, lifeless, hostile--and the climate as exceptionally hostile, a source of almost uninterrupted unpleasantness for the narrator. Mrs. Bentley's loneliness; her paranoic feelings of impending social or marital disaster; her sense of being trapped, imprisoned, stifled in the town and within her role, are all reflected in her descriptions of the environment which, as a whole, create patterns of symbolism in the novel. One of the main images to emerge is that of the Plains as an immense void or wasteland in which the tiny, insignificant town is in constant danger of obliteration, usually by the wind. Mrs. Bentley describes this sensation in her first entry:

> It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it. The town seems huddled together cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind. (p. 5)

The wind is often seen as the agent of destruction, as "it sets itself against the town" (p. 43), torments Mrs. Bentley with dust or heat or cold, lashes her garden into shreds, blows away the top soil and the hopes of farmers. For Mrs. Bentley, the frightening power of the wind suggests forces in life which threaten her:

> I found it hard myself to believe in the town outside, houses, streets, and solid earth. Mile after mile the wind poured by, and we were immersed and lost in it. I sat breathing from my throat, my muscles tense. To relax, I felt, would be to let the walls around me crumple in. (p. 38).

The wind is the primeval enemy. Its destruction of Mrs. Bentley's garden is a symbolic miniature of the agricultural disaster on the Plains at that time. In its psychological parallel, it also suggests the destruction of Mrs. Bentley's life.

The narrator's attitudes towards other environmental features usually reflect her own moods. For example, on their first day in Horizon, when Mrs. Bentley is depressed at the prospect of another fruitless year, the rain is described as "a thin, disheartening drizzle" (p. 7), which stains the ceiling and oppresses her spirit. However, on another occasion when she and Philip enjoy a moment of rare rapport, she sees the rain as something good because it draws people close together (p. 27). After a country service in which her husband preaches to farmers who have not had a crop in five years, Mrs. Bentley describes the clear, still morning in terms which suggest an ominous fear: "the sky had a fragile, crystal look as if a touch or breath might bring it round our heads in tinkling ruin" (p. 19). Here, even a sunny day is threatening. In other passages, snow and heat suggest the narrator's feeling of being trapped and stifled by small-town narrowness and by her own hypocrisy: snow in April is "thick, slow, smothering" (p. 28); August heat, at the precise point when their adopted son is taken away, is "heavy and suffocating" and they are "imbedded in it like insects in a fluid that has congealed" (p. 117). Major storms recorded by Mrs. Bentley coincide with the crises in her own life, notably at the end of the novel when she finally confronts her husband with the knowledge of his adultery. At this very point, a great dust and wind storm darkens the sky and blows down most of the false fronts in the town. This latter event is rather obviously symbolic of the final removal of the "false fronts" used by the Bentleys, when they communicate honestly with one another and abandon their roles of preacher and wife for good.

Important environmental themes are developed when Mrs. Bentley refers to the members of the farming community, to whom her husband preaches each week in a small rural schoolhouse. The farmers are seen sympathetically as direct victims of drought, wind, hail, unlike the residents of the town who are removed from this elementary struggle. Mrs. Bentley describes the rural congregation in images which suggest their closeness to the land and, in an important passage, she suggests that their religious observances are attempts to assert their own meaning and importance in the face of an indifferent universe. The rationalist schoolteacher, Paul, summarizes this idea:

> Man can't bear to admit his insignificance. If you've ever seen a hailstorm, or watched a crop dry up--his helplessness, the way he's ignored--well, it was just such helplessness in the beginning that set him discovering gods who could control the storms and seasons. Powerful, friendly gods--on his side. (p. 19)

Even Mrs. Bentley admits that she shrinks from her own insignificance in the wilderness and must conceive of a supernatural being, even a hostile one, "for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all" (p. 100). In her descriptions of the poverty and anxiety of the farm people, and of their desperate prayers for rain, Mrs. Bentley evokes the atmosphere of the drought years for the reader.

Like McCourt's *Music at the Close*, *As for Me and My House* presents an extremely disheartening view of the Plains environment and, for the most part, of its people. Because of the novel's primary psychological themes, almost all of Mrs. Bentley's references to the environment must be linked in some way to her own moods and fears; because her predominant mood is one of uncertainty and depression, her attitude towards the Plains is correspondingly negative. Though the setting functions symbolically in this way, it is not necessarily unrealistic. Mrs. Bentley's diary traces in minute detail the year-long cycle of drought weather, for example, in which rain falls in April but not in June when it is needed. Her descriptions of deadly summer heat and of duststorms are vivid. Her feeling of being lost or totally insignificant in the immensity of the Great Plains is not new or unusual; such a feeling is also recorded in factual accounts by pioneers to Saskatchewan. However, the Plains setting in Ross's novel serves primarily an artistic purpose: to reveal dimensions of the character of Mrs. Bentley. This is a painstakingly genuine novel, unsentimental in its depiction of the people and the environment of Saskatchewan. For this reason alone it is one of the best literary works to come from the Plains.

Ross, Sinclair. *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

This is probably the best collection of stories so far produced by a Saskatchewan author. They are powerful and moving portrayals of life on small Saskatchewan farms presented against a background of the drought and depression of the Thirties. While Ross's four novels have town or city settings, all his short stories have rural settings and each is more or less limited to recounting the experiences of one family. The stories explore the human struggles against an uncaring, often violent environment; the terrible effects of isolation on the Plains; and the ways in which the environment shapes the character of men and women, often making them unable to reach one another in compassion and warmth. Man in the Plains environment is here portrayed as a victim of land, weather, and, in part, of his own nature in which pride often increases his alienation from others. The stories bring to life the environment as enemy, with its unpredictability, its weapons of hail, snow, wind, and deadly heat. The stories are all readable and because several--such as "The Outlaw," "Cornet at Night," "Circus in Town," "The Runaway," and "One's a Heifer"--have adolescents as their protagonists, they are of special interest to young people.

Margaret Laurence has written an excellent critique of these stories in her introduction to the book, in which she summarizes the relationship of environment and character in Ross's stories. The women, she says, are intensely loyal and hard-working, yet they long for communication and tenderness from their husbands and often for a better life away from the land, at least for their children. The men are plagued by great uncertainties arising from their futile struggles with the land, yet they are inarticulate, unable to acknowledge their vulnerability, stubbornly maintaining faith in the land and in their own ability to make it yield. Like their wives, they too need the solace of human companionship but they often refuse to yield to it lest they appear unmanly (pp. 9-10). Many of the stories deal with the crises brought on by years of drought, and show the great strengths and weaknesses of the characters who grapple with their fate.

"The Lamp at Noon" is a terrifying story which dramatizes the effects of isolation and relentlessly hostile weather on a farm woman. The lamp lit at mid-day because of dust storms is the concrete symbol of an unnatural situation created out of five years of drought. Ellen has reached her breaking-point and pleads with her husband to give up the struggle with the land, but he stubbornly remains, careful not to reveal his fear or doubts. Ross provides stark descriptions of the psychological effects of constant wind and isolation on Ellen, as in increasing madness she imagines the wind to be alive and pursuing her. Feeling "caged" by the duststorm, in despair and madness, she runs out into the wind and dust with her small baby, whom she inadvertently smothers in her crazed efforts to protect him from the storm. There is a fine irony in the fact that her husband discovers them in the fields just after he has come to grips with the brutal reality of the storm's devastation of his land.

In "The Painted Door," a somewhat sensational story of infidelity and death, Ross explores another dimension of the psychological effects of loneliness and isolation. Again, the husband is work-sodden and unable to provide the warmth and companionship which his wife needs. He willingly slaves for fifteen hours a day to provide for her, but is unable to give of himself after seven years of marriage. He is also unaware of the effects of prolonged isolation on his wife, for whom the Plains in winter are totally inimical to human life:

> In the clear, bitter light the long white miles of prairie landscape seemed a region alien to life. Even the distant

> farmsteads she could see served only to intensify a sense of isolation. Scattered across the face of so vast and bleak a wilderness it was difficult to conceive them as a testimony of human hardihood and endurance. Rather they seemed futile, lost, to cower before the implacability of snowswept earth and clear pale sun-chilled sky. (p. 100)

During a severe blizzard, believing her husband to be unable to return to the farmhouse after he has gone to check on his father, five miles distant, she succumbs to her desperate need for human contact and commits adultery with a young bachelor. In the story's horrifying climax, the two discover the husband's frozen body along with evidence that he had known of the adultery and therefore had committed suicide. This grisly climax drives home the truth that a cruel land can create an emotional gulf between husband and wife.

In the two-part story "Not by Rain Alone" we see how human lives on the Plains are buffeted about by the vagaries of climate. In Part I, the young farmer waits helplessly for the rain which will save his crop; when it comes, he is given hope for a life decent enough to enable him to propose marriage to the woman he loves. In Part II, about a year later, the climate becomes an enemy which undoes any good it has done. Terrible snowstorms in September force the husband out to the range to find his cattle and bring them to shelter. He is stranded overnight, away from his wife who is due to give birth. When he returns in the morning, he finds the house full of drifted snow and his wife dying. Perhaps more than in any other story, Ross here shows how the uncaring and unpredictable environment plays havoc with innocent human lives.

"A Field of Wheat" also focuses on the unequal and eternal struggle between man and nature. It is an eloquent, vividly descriptive story of the effects of a sudden, devastating hailstorm on a prairie farm family--effects which are seen from the point of view of the woman. We see how the joy and hope aroused by a bumper crop are crushed by a freakish whim of nature, and how man at such moments is merely a helpless, pitiful onlooker. Again, Ross suggests how the environment affects the characters of men and women differently. The father, toughened by his battle with the land, hides his emotions after the hailstorm in order to appear invincibly strong. The mother lives in hope for a better life for her children, and though she longs for genuine communication with her husband, she comes to realize that she must be the unacknowledged source of strength in the family. The story ends on a note of qualified hope as the mother returns to her work with renewed resolve to go on.

"One's a Heifer" is a fascinating, suspenseful story which explores the effects of prolonged isolation on a human personality. What begins as a simple story of a thirteen-year-old boy's search for lost calves becomes a nightmarish quest into madness--the disintegration of a human being as a result of total non-contact on the Plains.

The boy's journey on horseback through the bleak and harsh winter prairie suggests a spiritual journey which becomes increasingly frightening. At the start of his journey, the morning atmosphere is clear and bitter, the distant farm buildings distinct against the Plains. However, as the boy's spirits flag, the setting mirrors his emotions: the cold is "deadly" and the vast Plains seem to assert themselves "like a disapproving presence" (p. 120). The land is both inhospitable and indifferent, as the fields and sky seem to stare at him. As the journey progresses, the setting becomes bleaker with spreading cloud-cover and "a nagging wind." As darkness closes in the boy comes upon the littered, inhospitable dwelling of Vickers, an "isolato" who, we discover, has been so totally cut off from human contact in an inhospitable environment that he has been driven to a pathological distrust of human beings. The boy originally suspects him of stealing his calves; as the fearful night continues, he comes to a climactic discovery of the true darkness of Vickers' soul, for Vickers may have murdered the one person who cared for him (the girl who came and cooked for him). The story, a good mystery with a startling ending, is also a subtle psychological study which links isolation on the Plains environment with real madness.

All nine stories are exceptionally entertaining as well as penetrating in their depiction of the effects of the Plains environment on rural people. Many of these stories may be somewhat melancholy, even morbid in tone; however, they are not depressing to read because of their close-knit plots and their clever use of suspense. Ross stresses how the cruelty of the environment either drives people to impossible levels of stoicism, endurance and pride, or breaks them into cruelty and madness. His only solution is in loving human contact--an area in which most of his characters are painfully inept.

Supplementary Bibliography: Fiction

Banfill, Bessie Jane. *Pioneer Nurse*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967.

Experiences of a nurse in the "wilds" of Saskatchewan. (P.L.73)

Bindloss, Harold. *A Sower of Wheat*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1901.

The setting is said to be the English colony at Cannington Manor in southeastern Saskatchewan. (Peel)

Butler, Sir William Francis. *Red Cloud, the Solitary Sioux: A Story of the Great Prairie*. London: Low & Co., 1882.

An important historical novel by the great soldier-adventurer. A new edition was published by Macmillan of Toronto in 1910. (Peel)

Campbell, Grace MacLennan. *Fresh Wind Blowing*. Toronto: Collins, 1947.

Starting in the Qu'Appelle Valley, the story takes the characters through World War II. (Peel)

Chapman, Ethel M. *The Homesteaders*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1936.

The setting is northern Saskatchewan. (Peel)

Connor, Ralph (pseud. of Charles William Gordon). *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan*. Toronto: Westminster Co., 1909.

The hero is a Ukrainian youth. The work is sometimes titled *The Settler*. (Peel)

Curwood, James Oliver. *The River's End: A New Story of God's Country*. New York: Cosmopolitan Book Corp., 1919.

Much of the action takes place in Prince Albert. (Peel)

Photograph by Mark Arneson

Prairie pothole, west of Saskatoon

Ken Mitchell

Grayson, Ethel Kirk. (from Moose Jaw, Sask.) *Willow Smoke*. New York: Vinal, 1928.

This novel is set in a small Saskatchewan community. (Peel)

Grove, Frederick Philip. *Our Daily Bread*. New York: Macmillan & Co., 1928.

Now a classic of Canadian literature, this is the story of a prairie farmer's struggle to keep his family on the land. (Peel)

Kerr, Illingworth H. (born at Lumsden, Sask.) *Gay Dogs and Dark Horses*. Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1946.

Humorous literary sketches of a teen-age boy and some of the zany characters in a town in the Qu'Appelle Valley. The work reveals the author's great fondness for the valley landscape and touches on several environmental subjects. It is particularly preoccupied with hunting, whether of ducks, geese, moose, prairie wolves or coyotes. One story describes a wolf-hunt using dogs; this grisly and unsavory account of a masculine ritual turns into a spoof when the stunned wolf escapes. Nonetheless, man is seen as the rightfully dominant predator in Kerr's work.

Mitchell, Kenneth R. *This Train*. Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1973.

This play records the tragi-comic dialogue between Billy, the obese and dull postmaster of Wheat City, and Rose, the tough, heavy-drinking wife of a railway agent, as the two wait for the train at the Wheat City station. Their conversation paints an intricate picture of both personalities and gives a glimpse of the petty and amusing events in a small prairie town. To a minor degree only, the play touches on the Plains environment, particularly the weather. Billy is also the town's official Weatherman, and he compulsively watches the sky and speaks of cloud patterns and pressure zones. An insensitivity and indifference to the natural milieu is typified by Rose, absorbed in her own narrow, decaying world.

Ross, Sinclair. *Sawbones Memorial*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

The protagonist of this unusual novel is "our old Sawbones," the seventy-five-year-old doctor Dan Hunter, who has worked in the town of Upward, Saskatchewan, for 45 years. The town's farewell party for him (in 1948) makes up the entire action of the novel, as friends, patients, townspeople, reveal a fascinating potpourri of prairie experiences. The hard life of Saskatchewan farmers is never far in the background in their conversations. When they speak of pioneer days, they tell how they survived, both physically and psychologically, the poor crops, long winters, loneliness and other hardships. However, the novel's main focus is on the cruelty of people, not of the environment.

Sluman, Norma. *Poundmaker*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967.

This is a fictionalized story of the Chief of the Battleford area Crees. He tried hard to effect a peace between Riel and the Government but failed. This book is historical fiction of the highest calibre. (P.L. 71)

Symons, Robert D. *Still the Wind Blows: A Historical Novel of the Canadian North-West*, 1860-1916. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1971.

This novel focuses on the Cree Indian involvement in the Riel Rebellion of 1885, as it traces the story of John Curtis, a white man caught in the turmoil of his times. Curtis is official mourner for the Cree Nation, a people maligned and misrepresented through the mists of time. (P.L. 71)

Tyre, Robert. *Along the Highway*. Regina: School Aids and Text Book Publishing Co. Ltd., 1950.
Tyre, a columnist for the *Leader-Post*, poses here as a "roving reporter" in this collection of stories and sketches of Saskatchewan life. As he describes the people, towns and lands of Saskatchewan, his fondness for the environment of the Plains clearly emerges. Yet while he admits he is "under the spell of the broad expanses, the vast northland," he also perceives the prairie in winter as lonely, "bleak and oppressive."

Wiebe, Rudy H. *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962.
The author has chosen the year 1944 as the War is drawing to a close to recount the events in a Mennonite community in Northern Saskatchewan. Peter Black, the deacon, has brought the community to a thriving condition, but the pressures of war and the surrounding society on this peaceful community threaten it, as does the hidden violence lurking in their own lives. (P.L. 71)

Wiebe, Rudy H. *The Temptations of Big Bear*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973. (New Canadian Library Edition #N122)
An historical novel which spans the years 1876 to 1886 and documents the struggle of Big Bear and his Cree people against the devastating upheaval of their way of life, brought about by the white man. Big Bear represents an attitude towards the earth which is the antithesis of the white man's concept of Property. He sees the environment as common to all and the provider for all:

> We take what the Earth gives us when we need anything, and we leave the rest for those who

> follow us. What can it mean, that I and my
> family will have a 'reserve of one square mile'?

Detailed and meticulously researched, *The Temptations of Big Bear* is a dramatic study of the destruction of a people and their way of life. This novel won the Governor General's Award in 1974.

Wiebe, Rudy H. *Where Is the Voice Coming From?* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

The thirteen stories in Wiebe's first collection of short stories are marked by their excellent writing and emotional intensity. The stories are highly dramatic, often dealing with human tragedy and suffering which, in some instances, are taken from real life on the Canadian Plains. Many of the stories have a historical perspective, with themes related to the plight of native peoples in the West ("All on Their Knees," "Along the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan," "The Fish Caught in the Battle River"); some deal more or less directly with environmental hazards ("Tudor King" and "All on Their Knees" are both set against the background of treacherous prairie blizzards). Many of the stories whose true focus is a human event nonetheless allude to a harsh environment which is indifferent to human suffering. Though these stories may vary in setting, themes, tone and point-of-view, they consistently strive for authenticity and intensity in the dramatization of human events. They all make compelling reading.

B. PIONEER LIFE

Introduction

Few human events on the Plains are as compelling as the great immigration and settling of the land by the pioneers. Why did they come here? How did they react initially to the Plains environment? And most important, how did they survive, both physically and spiritually, the rigours of climate and the seeming desolation of the land? These questions and others are explored by the pioneer writers and by the later historians and biographers whose works are included in this section.

Often lured by exaggerated stories of the Promised Land, pioneers such as the ill-starred Barr colonists found the Plains an alien and inhospitable environment. In general, for those accustomed to the rolling green countryside of eastern Canada or to the cities of Europe, the climate and topography of the Plains were a source of overwhelming anxiety. The works of Maryanne Caswell and of Mary Hiemstra, who were children when their families homesteaded on the Plains, provide sensitive, often delightful accounts of the difficult adjustment to this environment. While both were aware of beauty, they were above all preoccupied with their own *fear* of the environment, a fear which seems to stem from man's unnatural exposure on the flat and treeless Plains. Interestingly, these works also celebrate a simple, utilitarian philosophy and the support of family life as the means to survival. More straightforward, factual accounts of the business of homesteading are provided by Clara Hoffer, James M. Minifie and George Shepherd. The concerns of these pioneers went far beyond mere survival: they were determined to control their environment. Yet even they came to feel the real need for comfort and beauty in their surroundings.

Scientists believe that man's ancestors originated in the forests of earth and, as they learned to adapt themselves to life in any environment, moved out to the savannas and finally to the Great Plains. Accounts by the pioneers on the Saskatchewan Plains suggest that, while man may be the most adaptable of animals, he has never been truly comfortable out of his primeval womb-like environment.

Buck, Ruth Matheson. *The Doctor Rode Side-Saddle*. Toronto:
McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

This is the story of Elizabeth Matheson, one of Canada's first woman doctors, who practised medicine at the Indian reserve of Onion Lake, Saskatchewan, from 1898 to 1918. The book is also a compelling picture of pioneer life in Saskatchewan seen through the eyes of the doctor's daughter, Ruth Matheson Buck. Elizabeth Matheson is portrayed as a determined, rather unusual person, whose character and achievements are recounted from her early days in Ontario and India until her death in 1958.

The book presents Dr. Matheson's many struggles: as a mother of nine; as a competent physician who suffered discrimination within the medical profession; as the only doctor at the Onion Lake Mission, where she had to gain the trust of the Cree Indians. The biography refers to the doctor's many difficult journeys to the remote areas of her practice. On her initial journey in 1892 with her husband, John Matheson, to Battleford and Onion Lake, Dr. Matheson regarded the environment as "beautiful parkland country, bright with flowers, sweet with the scent of wolf-willow and wild roses." This land of beauty, however, is also at times the cruel and desolate land with which the doctor must contend to reach her patients in wilderness areas.

This is an interesting biography of a pioneer doctor, with some useful references to the environment of central Saskatchewan and its effects on a remarkable individual and her family.

Caswell, Maryanne. *Pioneer Girl: A Young Girl's Letters Describing Homestead Life in Saskatchewan, 1887 - 1888.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

The circumstances surrounding this unusual book are explained in the Preface, which also provides much useful background material in a capsule history of frontier Saskatchewan. We learn that James Caswell left Ontario with his wife and six children in 1887 to join his brothers on a homestead near Saskatoon. The eldest child, Maryanne, a high-spirited and intelligent fourteen-year-old, had promised her grandmother that she would send a full report of their journey and their adventures, and the diary letters which make up *Pioneer Girl* are the result of that promise.

The youth, spontaneity, sensitivity, and sense of humour of their author make these letters a delight to read. Maryanne captures the sights and sounds, the comedy and the hardships of the month-long trek by oxteam from Moose Jaw to Clark's Crossing. She also describes the family's first months on the homestead. Her writing is surprisingly polished and shows not only Maryanne's keen and practical observation of events but also her skilful use of imagery. For example, after observing that a flock of wild geese "looked like an order of priests with their black collars and cowls," she states matter-of-factly, "We had them for dinner."

Throughout her letters, the author is keenly aware of the Plains environment and, at times, seems almost obsessed with accurately describing what she experiences in the environment. Though she is frequently aware of the beauty of the Plains, as in her sensuous description of the prairie crocus, the predominant theme throughout her letters is the inhospitable bleakness of the vast Plains. Though she makes no direct comparisons of this landscape with her Ontario home, she is clearly disturbed by the flatness, the barren sameness and the vast expanse of the Plains. Her many references to the Plains suggest her sense of oppression: the land is "a prairie sea," "this bleak yellow plain," "this great, bare, solitary vastness," "the great lonely prairie" and "this lone land." Her sense of monotony is eased only with some variation in topography, such as rolling hills, poplar trees and creeks. During haying time, she records her terrible loneliness on the expanse of Plains, her fear of the vastness and of being "left alone without any hope in this great emptiness."

Maryanne also provides many interesting descriptions of specific natural phenomena. She records the vagaries of weather on their journey and frequently describes the sky scene, as though the land itself can provide little beauty. She describes in awe "the wonderful and mighty Saskatchewan river" and provides almost a catalogue of local prairie flowers and useful herbs and spices, always with comments on their colour and unique beauty. The author's youthful imagination at times heightens her sense of wonder and fear in this environment. A violent hailstorm with high winds is described in an image of malevolent forces which actively oppose the human invasion of the Plains. In the July heat, she sees the prairie "transformed into an enchanted land, inhabited by elves and fairies...." Once again, the variety provided by insects and flowers makes the Plains more hospitable. The author's description of a prairie fire at night includes a personification of the fire as a sort of demonic force, "dancing in mad delight."

These letters provide a readable record of a pioneer experience and a discussion of the psychological effects of the Plains environment on a sensitive and observant young mind. Though Maryanne Caswell is often oppressed by the "lonely prairie," she is also capable of responding to its beauty. In her final letter she describes the northern lights and concludes--"there's beauty here, Grandma."

Hiemstra, Mary. *Gully Farm*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1955.

Gully Farm, one of the best of Saskatchewan's pioneer works, has achieved enough popularity to be re-issued in a McClelland and Stewart paperback in 1966. The work is the diverting and often exciting story of the Pinder family, who emigrated from England to Canada with the Barr Colony in 1903. The narrator is the eldest daughter of the family, who was a little girl of six and seven when her family made the journey, but whose recollection of events and emotions is remarkably clear. Much of the merit of this true story comes from the dramatic way in which past events are presented; the author does not merely tell us about them, but actually recreates the feelings and actions of a pioneering family as they break the raw prairie sod and build their first log shack, or as they struggle through their first very hard winter. The work is acclaimed primarily as a moving story of human determination and family loyalty in the face of prolonged hardships on the Saskatchewan Plains. It is also a record of a pioneer family's first impressions of the land and climate of the Plains, and of their gradual heroic adjustment to the rigorous demands of this environment.

Mary Hiemstra goes to great lengths to describe the Plains environment and to recreate its effect on her. In the early chapters, she relates the journey by boat and then by train to Saskatoon, beyond which was the "promised land" of 160 acres which would be their homestead. Throughout the account of their migration, the author frequently records her feelings of awe and fear as they crossed the Great Plains to settle in the Battleford area. The predominant themes throughout her descriptions of the environment stress the land's emptiness, vastness and indifference to human life, and her family's resultant feelings of alienation and fear. She refers meaningfully to the land as the "wide empty prairie," the "grey, inhospitable prairie" with a "grey, hostile sky...even bigger than the land" (p. 55). In one passage she describes their feelings of terror when her father must return to Saskatoon for food and leave his family alone on the prairie. Her constant refrain is that the land is empty and therefore somehow threatening:

> The prairie had seemed empty before, but without Dad it was desolate: a vast, empty space that cared nothing at all about us. Wherever we looked there was nothing but grey grass and pale sky that had been there since time began, and would still be there after we had gone. (p. 85).

At one point, her fear is so great that she feels afraid to breathe in the infinite emptiness (p. 86). During the night their fear is heightened, for though they cannot see the emptiness they feel its presence, and even her mother's cheerful voice cannot drive it away. This perception of the environment as terrifyingly empty--and lacking the familiar and comforting shelter of hills, trees, hedgerows, and villages--is lessened but never quite eliminated during their first years on the Plains.

An amusing conflict of attitudes towards the Plains is provided by the author's parents, who seem to be at opposite poles in a light-hearted battle over the wisdom of their migration. The mother's endless refrain is that she wants to return to England, and she is never able to see the Plains environment without comparing it to England. For her, the Plains are only vast and bleak "without a hedge or wall anywhere" (p. 53); the Saskatchewan River, unlike the friendly little Spen at home, is "far too big and wild" (p. 109). The strength and unfailing optimism of the father, however, sustains his wife and family throughout the early period of dismay and hardship. It is in part his sense of humour, along with his firm belief in hard work, endurance and common sense, which enables him ultimately to triumph over the environment. When they choose a homestead site in early spring, though Mary and her mother are disappointed at its barrenness, the father is highly enthusiastic about its rich soil, the available moisture, the pleasant spring weather, the potential for hunting. As he laboriously builds his first house out of poplar logs, the father is nourished by his great faith in the "land of plenty" myth so prevalent among the Barr colonists. The reality of the first difficult winter on the Plains diminishes this faith considerably.

The story conveys the author's growing and intense love for the natural environment of the Plains. She describes with wonder and sensitivity the colour and fury of the homesteaders' first thunderstorm on the Plains, the terrors of prairie fires, the variations of climate, the progress of the seasons with their accompanying changes in plant and animal life, the violence and danger of a prairie blizzard, the total change of mood on the homestead with the coming of spring. In a lengthy description of the "agonized sound" of the coyote's wail, the author provides a beautiful summary of the nature of wilderness and, indirectly, one of the best explanations I have read for man's incessant attempts to exterminate the coyote. She remains threatened by the emptiness of the Plains, however, particularly in winter when she senses an added menace in the environment. Even during the Christmas festivities, when three families come together for a simple dinner with no trimmings, she describes their sense of the oppressive loneliness which surrounds the little cabin. Yet she shares with her father a sound belief in the industry and determination which were necessary for survival on the Plains. She is also capable of analyzing the fear of the wilderness of most Barr colonists, who, accustomed to large and crowded English cities, were unable to adapt to the emptiness of the Plains. The Pinder family survived because they were capable of gradual adjustment to the environment, and because they sustained one another with the warmth of human fellowship.

This work is strongly recommended to anyone interested in the psychological and social effects of the Plains environment on the pioneers. Best of all, *Gully Farm* is an exciting and dramatic story, never dull, with many very moving descriptions of the Plains and of pioneer life as seen by a sensitive and keenly observant young girl.

Hoffer, Clara, and F. H. Kahan. *Land of Hope*. Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1960.

This is the true story of Israel Hoffer and of the pioneer settlement of a Jewish colony on the Saskatchewan Plains. Written by Hoffer's wife, the book tells us of his people's removal from the land in Austria and of Hoffer's passionate determination to come to Canada to take up land, to own it and to live on it. For him and the colony which settled in the Estevan area in 1907, Saskatchewan was truly the "land of hope" for those with the strength and skill to find success as pioneers.

Hoffer's attitude towards the Plains is described as a combination of love and a determination to make the land profitable. He is at first impressed with the vitality, youth and promise of the land; according to Clara, he even comes to love the combination of hills and flat Prairie "with a fierceness which was to remain with him, undiminished throughout his lifetime" (p. 23). However, the depth of this love is questionable, for Hoffer later finds the Qu'Appelle Valley "a welcome change from the montony of the hills surrounding his homestead and a feast to his eyes starved for beauty." At this point, Hoffer apparently has some regrets about having settled in a treeless area of the Plains, in spite of its potential productivity. Originally, for Hoffer, hills were "to mold, to produce," rocks were to move, rivers to be fished; eventually he grows more aware of the human need for comfort and beauty in the environment.

The colony suffered the usual dreadful hardships during their first winter on the homestead. The author stresses the grim psychological effects of the harsh climate and the cheerless, empty landscape; they found "no comfort or companionship in the rising whistling wind or endless monotonous miles of snow-covered prairie stretching out into infinity..." (p. 26). For the author herself, the greatest enemy was loneliness, a feeling of complete alienation from life. The colony met other hardships as well, including terrible prairie fires, hailstorms, and, beginning in 1931, the dust clouds, grasshoppers and emaciated cattle of the drought years. In spite of Hoffer's struggles to hold the colony together during the Thirties, this "war" of nature against man left the colony with only twenty of its original fifty families. This chapter of the book includes a marvellous description of the homesteaders' joy when the rainfalls finally came to end the drought.

Land of Hope is a straightforward account of a pioneer colony on the Plains and of its remarkable leader. Indirectly, the work makes an important statement about man's perception of the Plains: he must view the environment in terms of more than its productivity, its usefulness; he must also view it in terms of its particular effects on the human spirit.

Minifie, James M. *Homesteader: A Prairie Boyhood Recalled.*
Toronto: Macmillan, 1972.

James M. Minifie, for years a well-known correspondent with the C.B.C., has left us a valuable personal memoir which covers the period from his childhood in England and his father's decision in 1909 to emigrate to Saskatchewan, up to Minifie's final prairie days at Regina College (1924). The book presents the facts of prairie homesteading in a straightforward way and does not, for example, investigate the psychological effects of the Plains environment on the immigrants, as do other such works. On the whole, Minifie gives the impression that the material or survival concerns of homesteading did not usually allow "time for aesthetic appreciation" of the environment (p. 107). Awareness of the environment, for him, was important only insofar as it affected the processes of farming; in this area, Minifie's story is detailed and informative.

The book begins with an exposé of the Canadian government booklets which lured settlers to the Plains with grandiose advertising. Prospective immigrants were often misinformed about taxation, rainfall, soil quality and other vital facts. Brochures by private land speculators, which boasted of inexhaustible soil and of virtual freedom from rust and insects, could be even more misleading. As one would expect, the reality of the Minifie family's homestead days near Sintaluta is, by contrast, one of frequent discomfort and of endless contention with a hostile environment. Minifie's father survived by beginning his homestead life in a sort of co-operative of ten farmers who helped one another and shared equipment; once reasonably established, he sent for his wife and two sons from England.

Like many other pioneers, the author at first compared everything about the Canadian Plains to his early environment in England:

> Even the prairies, once we reached them after the interminable lakes and rocks and tamarack, were not the green, flowery meadows we were used to, but dun-coloured plains stretching to the horizon, dotted with ponds where wild ducks disported themselves. (p. 28)

Seldom in the book does Minifie's enthusiasm for the Plains environment exceed this level. Yet in spite of his English ideal, the author comments astutely on the application of English methods of cultivation to the prairies--methods suited to wet soil but disastrous on the dry, windy Plains. In one passage, he records the somewhat amusing cynicism with which one pioneer faced his new environment. Having just filed on his half-section homestead for a ten-dollar fee, the neighbour claimed that "the gummint just bet me ten bucks against a half-section that I can't stand this climate for three years!" (pp. 42-43). With its vivid accounts of early settlement problems related to the environment, Minifie's book would almost seem to put the odds on the climate.

The earlier chapters provide a detailed factual account of the *business* of pioneer farming, its costs and essential methods. Small and large environmental obstacles to homesteading are described, such as mosquitoes, gumbo, creeks either dry or dangerously deep in spring, the scarcity of water for wells. For Minifie, the wind is the curse of the prairies, a "malevolent demon" which smashes down crops, dries out the land, tears at the soil and makes ordinary daily activity a torment. He explains clearly the implications of the short growing season for prairie farm life. And he takes the "poetry" out of the farmer's life in passages which reveal the numbing drudgery of ploughing, well-digging, fence-building and so on. However, Minifie does not simply blame the environment for the difficulties of the prairie farmer's life; he also observes how the haste and ignorance of the farmers caused lasting ecological disturbances on the Plains and ushered in the dust-bowl era. Pioneer farmers came to the short grass prairie on which a natural ground-cover had kept the land intact for thousands of years. In a very short time, they had destroyed that ground cover and exhausted the soil, thus disturbing the stable life pattern of the Plains (p. 52).

This book is informative in its memoir of the pioneer way of life in Saskatchewan. Its perception of the Plains environment is notably factual, albeit not highly imaginative; it views land and climate simply as elements to be conquered in the homesteader's struggle for supremacy.

Shepherd, George, and John Archer. *West of Yesterday*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965.

West of Yesterday is a well-written and valuable account of Mr. Shepherd's pioneer experiences and of the settling of Saskatchewan. Much of the book is set in the ranching area of southwestern Saskatchewan and describes the hardships endured by the homesteaders, the romantic and intense lifestyle of wealthy cattle ranchers, and the miseries of the Depression and the Dust-bowl. Shepherd makes several important observations about pioneering on the prairies, and in one instance compares the Canadian prairie frontier with its counterpart in the American Mid-West. He claims that although American pioneers faced the dangers inherent in lawlessness and Indian wars, the environmental hazards of the Canadian Plains were a far greater threat:

> The climate, the rainfall, the extremes of weather, the blizzards--these sharpened the anxieties and lessened the tolerance of chance survival. Even if the four essentials--shelter, food, water, fuel--were at hand and in condition and quantity to alleviate fear of lack, still one could not live a life untouched by these factors. Indeed, habits of dress, entertainment, and home furnishings were built into a frontier society that developed within the compass of earth, sky, and wind. (p. 43)

Shepherd's sensitivity to the effects of the Plains environment on human life makes this book a pleasure to read.

Supplementary Bibliography: Pioneer Life

Binnie-Clark, Georgina. A *Summer on the Canadian Prairie*. London: E. Arnold, 1910.

The author spent a summer at Lipton, Saskatchewan, on the edge of the Qu'Appelle Valley. She was favourably impressed with the opportunities the West offered, and describes vividly the people in the homesteading community. (Peel)

Binnie-Clark, Georgina. *Wheat and Women*. Toronto - Bell and Cockburn, 1914.

A vivid description of the author's three-year struggle (1905-1908) to make wheat farming pay on a farm near Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. A sequel to A *Summer on the Canadian Prairie*.

Campbell, Marjorie Elliott. *The Soil Is Not Enough*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1938.

Homesteading experiences of the author's father, William H. Wilkins, an Englishman who settled with his family about 40 miles north of Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, in 1904. (Peel)

Covey, Elizabeth R. *Comrades Two*, by Elizabeth Freemantle (pseud.). Toronto: Musson, 1907.

Sketches of pioneer life in the Qu'Appelle Valley. The American edition had the title *The One and I*. (Peel)

Davies, E., and A. Vaughan. *Beyond the Old Bone Trail*. London: Cassell, 1960.

The biography of Evan Davies, a Welsh pioneer on the Canadian prairies. He tells the story of pioneer settlers who "saw and survived the loneliness and cruelty" of the land. The "Bone Trail" was a track winding across the Plains south-west from Saskatoon. Evan Davies tells of his feeling of smallness under the huge sky; of lonely, treacherous winters spent in a flimsy shack hundreds of miles from the nearest town; of the gulf between the hopes and the realities of pioneer life.

Fairfax, D. *So Soon Forgotten.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1955.
Reminiscences of a prairie homesteader. (P.L. 71)

Gerrard, Elizabeth. *We Came to Canada.* Don Mills, Ontario: Longmans, 1967.
Informative, often amusing, account of the author and her family who leave a soft sheltered life in England for the vastly different milieu of Saskatoon. (P.L. 71)

Hewlett, A. E. *A Too Short Yesterday: Cannington Manor.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1970.
The day-by-day life of a family living in an English Colony on the Prairies from 1911 to 1925. (P.L. 71)

Loomis, A. *Ride Out Singing.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1951.
A young English girl who joins her brother on a farm near Regina in the Northwest Territories experiences many hardships before she learns to adapt herself to the Plains environment. (P.L. 71)

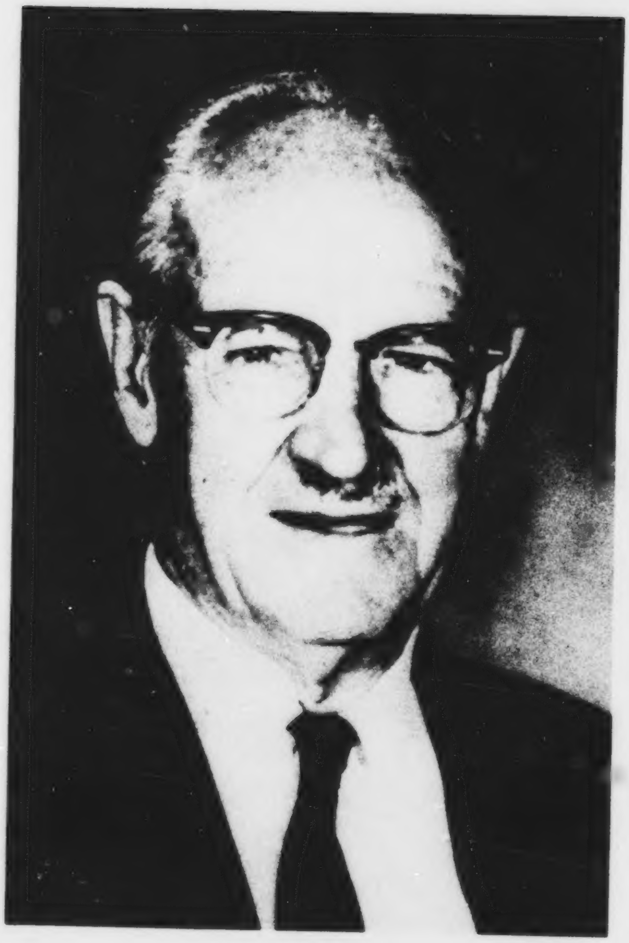
McDougall, John. *Saddle, Sled, and Snowshoe: Pioneering on the Saskatchewan in the Sixties.* Toronto: W. Briggs, 1896. (Peel)

MacEwan, Grant. *. . . and mighty women too: stories of notable western Canadian women.* Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1975.
The necessary companion to MacEwan's best-selling *Fifty Mighty Men*, this work shows in part how great women have not only coped but succeeded in a harsh land.

MacEwan, Grant. *Blazing the Old Cattle Trail.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1962.
Stories of pioneer hardship, ingenuity and courage in the earliest cattle and sheep drives on the Plains. The struggle to bring livestock into the new country and to take early herds out of it dates from the early nineteenth century.

MacMillan, Anne M. *Prince of the Plains.* Regina: School Aids and Text Book Publishing Co. Ltd., 1952.
A fictionalized account for juveniles of the Currie family--their long hard trek and their life on their homestead near 'Pile of Bones' (Regina) in 1882. (Peel and P.L. 71)

Pick, Harry. *Next Year: a semi-historical account of the exploits and exploitations of the far-famed Barr colonists, who, led by an unscrupulous Church of England parson, adventured deep into the wilderness of Canada's great North-West in the early days of the twentieth century.* Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1928.
This work is historical, though written in fictional form with developed characters. It is, in part, a satire on the folly of those pioneers who came to Canada unprepared and inexperienced in homesteading or farming. Of particular interest are Chapters 8 to 18, in which the author recounts the ill-starred journey from Saskatoon to the "promised land" (Lloydminster). The whole story is told with both humour and



Grant MacEwan

Photograph by Gary Robertson

A sign of our times, west of Regina

sympathy for the colonists, who were ignorant of the most basic pioneering skills. The hazards of crossing Eagle Creek with ox-carts, of a May snow storm, of prairie fires--these are recorded, along with the more comical episodes, such as the helpless floundering of wagons, oxen and horses engulfed in an alkali flat.

Reid, Helen Evans. *All Silent, All Damned: The Search for Isaac Barr.* Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969.
A sympathetic and readable account of the life of the Reverend Isaac Barr, who organized the mass emigration of some two thousand British colonists to Saskatchewan at the beginning of the twentieth century. (P.L. 71) The work shows how the British colonists, accustomed to "the little farms of England with ancient roads and tidy hedgerows," were unprepared for the vast, empty prairies and a "road" of only two wheel marks. On the trek from Saskatoon to Battleford, their real and imagined hazards included prairie fires, wolves and Indians, and nights which were bitterly cold for people inadequately clothed and sheltered only in tents.

Shubert, Bernard. *The Homesteader: A True Story. From the Pulpit to the Plow; 10 Years in Western Canada.* Franklin, N.Y.: (the author), 1945.
The author homesteaded near Expanse, Saskatchewan in 1909; he farmed there until 1918. (Peel)

Strange, K. *With the West in Her Eyes.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1945.
The story of the early days in western Canada has been told many times: Kathleen sets out to tell the story of the modern pioneer--the story of the men and women who left comfortable homes in big cities to face an unfamiliar and isolated life. (P.L. 71)

Tegart, W. A. S. *In the Face of the Winds*. Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1962.

The story of a young man homesteading in Saskatchewan in the early 1900's. (P.L. 71)

West, Edward. (English immigrant, spent two years on a homestead north of Radisson, Saskatchewan, just before World War I.) *Homesteading: Two Prairie Seasons*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918.

An excellent description of the homesteading experiences of two Englishmen in the Hafford district of Saskatchewan. (Peel) This readable, first-hand account of the hardships and joys of pioneer life includes many useful references to land and climate and their effects on the pioneers. In the account of breaking the prairie, the author's fondness for the environment and animal life is obvious. West is unusually perceptive of variety in the landscape and in animal life.

Wetton, Cecilia. *The Promised Land: The Story of the Barr Colonists*. Lloydminster: Lloydminster Times, 1953.

A short but interesting account of the founding and development of the Lloydminister settlement.

Wilkes, F. *They Rose from the Dust*. (Saskatoon, 1958).

A history of settlement and development in the central prairies between Moose Jaw and the South Saskatchewan River. (P.L. 71)

C. HISTORY

Introduction

There are a remarkable number of books on Saskatchewan history, from the life of the Plains Cree before the invasion of the white man, to the opening and settlement of the West and its development as one of the greatest grain-producing areas in the world. A basic truth which emerges from many of these historical works is that the white settlers' drive for control of the environment, rather than for harmony with it, has meant the virtual destruction of the Plains wilderness and its aboriginal people. With the end of the buffalo herds, the parcelling and selling of land as private property, and the establishment of agriculture as the economic mainstay of prairie society, there ceased to be a harmonious relationship between man and environment on the Plains.

In this section, several works deal with the life and traditional values of the Plains Cree--notably those by Edward Ahenakew, Chief Dan Kennedy, and Mary L. Weekes. The prominent explorer John Palliser, notorious for having declared much of Saskatchewan a wasteland, is treated by Irene Spry and (briefly) by Grant MacEwan. Zachary and Marie Hamilton have provided a glimpse of Regina in the late nineteenth century, when it was considered "a horrible place" totally unsuited to be the provincial capital. Heather Robertson's *Grass Roots*, a sensitive study of rural and village life on the Plains, examines the intimate relationship between prairie culture and the natural environment. Like Barry Broadfoot and James H. Gray, Robertson also deals with the grim years of depression and drought in the 1930's. The works in this section remind us that the white man's history in Saskatchewan has been largely one of battling the environment, as though to prove Palliser wrong at any cost.

Ahenakew, Edward. *Voices of the Plains Cree*. Edited and with an introduction by Ruth M. Buck. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973.

Writings on the Plains Indians usually stress the Indians' once unique relationship with the environment--their intimate harmony with land and climate, their wisdom in conservation, their nomadic life dependent on the buffalo--and the destruction of all this with their defeat by the white man. Ahenakew's work is one of the most authoritative and readable of all the accounts of the past and present of the Plains Cree. It is divided into two sections: the first presents twenty stories of "times past" by Chief Thunderchild (1849-1927), as originally recorded by Ahenakew; the second includes stories by the fictional "Old Keyam," an elderly Cree through whom Ahenakew reveals much of his own experience and his views on Cree society in the twentieth century.

The introduction by Ruth Matheson Buck provides useful information on the life of Thunderchild, on Cree history and Ahenakew's experiences. Chief Thunderchild had been one of the followers of Big Bear in resistance to the catastrophic Treaty Number Six of 1876, involving the surrender of the Plains and Woods Cree of the North Saskatchewan region. Following a desperate winter of starvation for his band, Thunderchild signed the treaty in 1879 and settled on a reserve near Turtle Lake. His people were all nomadic hunters of the Plains, and the reserve system and the destruction of the buffalo meant the end of their way of life. His stories here include accounts of historic events and notable individuals, of encounters with the forces and creatures of nature, and of ancient beliefs and customs. They cover the period of time from the mid-nineteenth century to the days of Treaty Number Six, the Northwest Rebellion, and reserve life.

Saskatchewan Archives Photograph

Edward Ahenakew

Photograph by Zane Hersak

Abandoned binder, near Kyle, Sask.

Thunderchild's stories of his youth, before the Plains Cree were "fenced into reserves," tell of the buffalo hunt, of warfare, and of the free and magnificent Plains wilderness. Later stories deal with the white man's destruction of the buffalo and the resulting winters of hardship and starvation for the Indians. The stories convey the Plains Indians' acute awareness of land and climate, their closeness to an environment on which they have traditionally depended. A particularly revealing story tells of the Cree use of Buffalo pounds to slaughter great numbers of animals at once, in order to obtain their hides for trade. This practice was in complete violation of the Indians' traditional mores, in which only what was immediately needed was taken in the hunt. Thunderchild's condemnation of that slaughter is like a bitter lament for his people's decline:

> Traders came to our encampment too, and it was always buffalo hides and pemmican they wanted. Hides. Hides. Shoot. Shoot. See who can shoot most. A curse upon man's greed and on the Crees for that inordinate slaughter. (p. 58)

Another story tells how the wisdom of the Cree religion came from life and from God's earth. The sacred rites of the Sun Dance--a prayer of thanksgiving and supplication--and of the Thirst Dance--a prayer for rain during time of drought--expressed the Crees' essential reverence and humility before an environment which touched every aspect of their lives.

The highly imaginative stories of Old Keyam, created by Ahenakew himself, are designed to complement Thunderchild's stories by telling of present times. The story-teller's name itself suggests the bewilderment of many present-day Indians: though he is one of the wise "old Men," the name "Keyam" literally means "What does it Matter?" or simply, "I do not care." Keyam lives as an old man on a reserve in the beautiful parklands of the northwest, a reserve situated along a lake full of nesting ducks and loons in summer. The speaker's love of this land is obvious in his intricate descriptions of its plant and animal life. Most important, however, are his comments on the Cree Indians' relationship to the Plains environment. In a discussion of the differences between the Woods Cree (of the North) and the Plains Cree, he touches eloquently upon the irreversible effects of environmental conditioning:

> I will always say that it is not so much in the man himself as in the place where he lives that the true difference lies .... I am a Plains Cree, and on the prairies I can believe that I am the centre of the world--my world. The land of the forest, with its lakes and waters broken by islands covered with spruce and tamarack, is a good land; and though I am naturally partial to the plains, I can admire it--but from a distance only. When I am in the midst of it, the silence of the forest presses upon me; I feel small and of no account; I walk as though under a spell. (pp. 84-85)

Amazingly, this same sense of alienation and smallness is described by countless immigrants to the Saskatchewan Plains, who were conditioned by either the large cities or the verdant, rolling countryside of England.

Through Old Keyam, Ahenakew also explains how life on the Plains had shaped the Cree temperament, making them bolder than other tribes and more skilled in chase and on horseback. Moreover, he claims, the Plains bred into the Cree a powerful spirit of freedom, which made them resist the treaties and exult in danger, and which aroused their hatred of sedentary life. Because of "the teaching of the prairie," which developed the instant and sharp application of all his powers in the buffalo chase, the Cree came to detest any work which required sustained effort and patience. Thus the decree of the Treaties that the Indians, after centuries of nomadic life, should become farmers meant the complete reversal of habits bred into them by their environment. Most important was the spirit of loyalty to the tribe which prairie life instilled into the Plains Cree. According to Old Keyam, the only relationships possible were friendship and enmity: "and the Indian was true to his friends and bitter to his enemies."

These stories of Chief Thunderchild and of Old Keyam deal with many other topics besides the Plains environment, but the land and its influence is never far in the background. Perhaps more than we can now grasp, the Plains shaped the character, religion, moral code --in fact, the entire lifestyle--of the Cree. Above all, for the Cree Indian the Plains were a divine gift to all creatures, a gift which could not be bought and sold. The white man's greedy desire to *own* land, as surely as his destruction of the buffalo, meant the end of the Cree way of life.

Ahenakew's book is both enjoyable and essential reading for those seeking a better understanding of the Plains Indian's relationship with his environment.

Hamilton, Zachary M. and Marie A. *These Are the Prairies.* Regina
School Aids and Text Book Pub.
Co., 1955.

This work combines the personal reminiscences of Marie Hamilton, who came to the Saskatchewan prairies as a child, and of her husband, Zachary Hamilton. Zachary, born in Scotland, as a young man came to Regina, Saskatchewan, where he worked as a newspaperman with Nicholas Flood Davin of *The Leader*. Their book covers the years 1882 to 1905 and includes a discussion of many important early developments of the frontier community, as well as some useful insights into pioneer perceptions of the environment.

According to the Hamiltons, many immigrants apparently viewed the Saskatchewan Plains with an unwise romanticism, as suggested by William Cullen Bryant's poem quoted in the Preface:

> These are the gardens of the desert: these
> The unshorn fields boundless and beautiful,
> For which the speech of England has no name--
> The prairies.

On the other hand, many pioneers were more down-to-earth in their view of the Plains as a land of economic opportunity, and the Canadian government certainly touted great plans for its development. In their frequent comments on the bleak and grim environment which in fact faced the pioneers, the authors suggest that the economic promise of the Plains barely compensated for its dreariness. Their description of the Regina site proposed for the provincial capital illustrates this attitude clearly. For them, the valley of Wascana Creek

> was so insignificant that it scarcely made a dent in the landscape. On every side the plain stretched as flat and expressionless as deal boards. There was not a boulder or stone for twenty miles, nor tree nor hill to break the monotony. The soil, however, did seem ideal for cereal crops. (p. 19)

Like many other writers at that time, the Hamiltons viewed Regina as altogether too bleak, inhospitable and impracticable to be the seat of prairie government.

The book provides several good descriptions of Regina in the 1880's. Marie recalls a child's fears of the blizzards and fierce cold during the bitter and stormy winter of 1882-83, when the shacks and tents of Regina were mercilessly exposed on the flat prairie. In the mid-1880's Regina was "a horrible place" characterized by environmental extremes; in summer, the place was either too wet, too dry, too windy, or plagued by mosquitoes and prairie fires. The Hamiltons also give historical accounts of the frontier community and of the Plains Indians, the North West Mounted Police, and missionaries, told in anecdotal form with some embellishment and dialogue.

The Hamiltons eventually moved to the Willow Bunch area, where they took up cattle ranching. For them, the rancher's life was considerably more pleasant than that of the wheat farmer because of environmental, not economic, factors. They describe homestead life in the wheat regions of the Plains as lonely and difficult, with the hardships of pioneer life compounded by dismal surroundings:

> ...the shack of the homesteader was often a lonely landmark on a stretch of plain as flat and expressionless as a deal board, relieved only by the half-mile strips of black ploughing which lay like mourning borders to a drab and melancholy landscape. (p. 90)

In contrast, cattle ranches were usually situated in valleys where there were trees and shelter and water, and where the life of the range-rider was considerably more romantic than that of the farmer. The difference between these two groups of pioneers is linked conclusively to their immediate environments as much as to their lifestyles, and, as ever, the Great Plains is perceived as uncompanionable and hostile in comparison with the rolling hills and green valleys of cattle country.

These Are the Prairies tells of many interesting events in the lives of two Saskatchewan pioneers who witnessed the growth of Regina and of prairie society. Its comments on the Plains environment are vivid, though at times of questionable accuracy. For example, in a few rather sensational stories, the wolf is condemned as the "killer of the range" who refuses to feed on carrion but must kill every time he has a meal. Such a statement is simply not supported by scientific evidence. Nevertheless, the book serves to bring to life both the land and climate of the Plains and the pioneer's perceptions of that environment.

MacEwan, John W. Grant. *Fifty Mighty Men.* Saskatoon, Modern Press, 1958.

Grant MacEwan, a prominent western Canadian writer and agriculturalist, was raised on a farm near Melfort, Saskatchewan. His book *Fifty Mighty Men* is a series of biographical sketches of the most distinctive men in the Canadian West. These biographies include several important figures in Saskatchewan history, and often refer to their attitudes towards the Plains. The explorer John Palliser, for example, saw the Plains as little more than desert with worthless soil; thus he deemed the vast area of Saskatchewan known as Palliser's Triangle as unfit for cultivation. MacEwan also describes how Nicholas Flood Davin, founder of the Regina *Leader* and spokesman for Regina as the capital of the North-West Territories, had to contend with serious environmental problems in establishing Regina as a viable town. The proposed site had no wood, no drinking water, and no drainage but an ineffectual creek.

There are fifty capsule biographies in this volume, and they provide a useful panorama of Western history as well as some idea of the varying attitudes towards the Saskatchewan Plains.

Robertson, Heather. *Grass Roots*. Toronto: J. Lewis and Samuel, 1973.

Undoubtedly, *Grass Roots* is one of the most comprehensive and controversial studies yet published of life on the farms and in the small towns of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Robertson's in-depth portrait of prairie society consists of a mixture of history, observation, impressions, and countless discussions with the ordinary people of the prairies. The book's twelve chapters focus on a variety of scenes and times to present a detailed and all-inclusive view of both social and physical environments. The first chapter, for example, describes minutely the way of life of one farm family near Landis, Saskatchewan. In part, Robertson shows how their tenuous way of life and their tough habit of mind are shaped by the Plains environment, as well as by economic and political pressures. This section includes some highly imaginative descriptions of the land by the author, and a moving declaration by the farmer himself of his feel and love of the land.

Other chapters include a history of the West, which focuses on the rise and fall of the rural way of life; portraits of Moose Jaw, in 1882 and 1972; the Depression and drought of the Thirties; the rise of Socialism; life in four small towns in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Allusions to the Plains and its climate are frequent, insofar as the author sees prairie culture as largely a product of its physical environment.

Grass Roots is very much a personalized study of Plains society, and bears its author's stamp clearly. Yet it is thorough, thought-provoking, and readable--highly recommended.

Heather Robertson

Photograph by Ian Caldwell

Prairie wheatfield at harvest, north of Regina

Spry, Irene M. *The Palliser Expedition: An Account of John Palliser's British North American Expedition, 1857-1860.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1963.

John Palliser, an Irishman, set out in the 1850's in command of an expedition to explore the vast land which is now western Canada. The expedition's purpose was to determine whether the country was suitable for settlement, and whether it could be linked with the British colony on the St. Lawrence, and with the Pacific coast. Among the assignments accomplished by Palliser and his colleagues (all scientists) was travelling by horse, Red River cart, snowshoe, and dog-train over wide stretches of the empty prairie between the Red River and and the Rockies.

This book is the dramatic story of how Palliser conceived the idea of exploring the unknown country of western Canada, and of the long and dangerous journeys undertaken by the expedition. These journeys were made exciting by buffalo-running and hunting for grizzly bears, and memorable by the splendid satisfaction of travelling across great wilderness distances of a new land. Palliser and his expedition played an important part in preserving that land to become a territory in the new Canadian nation.

Chapters 6 to 10 cover the momentous journey through what is now Saskatchewan (1857-58). At that time, the Plains of central Canada served two functions: 1) as a source of vital food supplies, especially pemmican, for the fur trade, and 2) as a protective barrier between the rich, fur-bearing regions farther north and those of the rival American fur traders. In terms of their own potential for agriculture and settlement, Palliser considered the Plains a total wasteland (it is ironic that these "desolate plains" now produce some of the finest wheat in the world). But Palliser's unfortunate conclusions have had far-reaching effects.

In his report on the Great Plains Palliser declared that the valleys of the Red River and the North Saskatchewan were well suited for settlement. However, he also pronounced the lands around the South Saskatchewan arid and sterile, in spite of their plentiful game and the evidence of fossils and cretaceous strata in the cliffs of the river. He mistakenly reported that in the southwestern part of the true prairie lands there were large areas where limited and uncertain rainfall and lack of water and timber would make cultivation and settlement difficult, if not impossible. This area is still called "Palliser's Triangle," and serves to define the boundaries of the true Plains country. Of course, magnificent wheat crops are now grown in this area, but it is also true that many farmers have ruined themselves trying to cultivate sub-marginal land.

Spry's book is probably the most thorough account of the Palliser expedition available, and is valuable for its accurate retracing of those great exploratory journeys. The author intelligently examines both the motives and the conclusions of Palliser regarding the Plains and suggests their implications for later settlement of this vast area. Although rather long, the book is both lively and absorbing to read.

Photograph by Dave Novak

Country church, near Craven, Sask.

Barry Broadfoot

Supplementary Bibliography: History

Ahenakew, Beth, and Sam Hardlotte, comp. *Cree Legends*. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1973. (P.L. 75)

Anderson, Frank W. *Regina's Terrible Tornado*. Regina: Frontiers Unlimited 1964.
The story of June 30, 1912.

Black, Norman Fergus (1876-1964). *History of Saskatchewan and the North-West Territories*. Regina: Saskatchewan Historical Co., 1913.
The first history of Saskatchewan written by an educationalist. Includes biographies of prominent citizens. (P.L. 71)

Broadfoot, Barry. *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*. Don Mills, Ontario: Paperjacks, 1975.
This is an important collection of images of the Depression across Canada, with a large portion devoted to Saskatchewan. Broadfoot shows how, on the Plains, farmers watched their fields turn into sandy deserts, and then abandoned them.

Cameron, William B. *The War Trail of Big Bear: being the story of the connection of Big Bear and other Cree Indian Chiefs and their followers with the Canadian North-West rebellion of 1885, the Frog Lake massacre and events leading up to and following it, and two months' imprisonment in the camp of the hostiles*. Toronto: Ryerson, 1926. (In 1950, a new revised edition of this very popular book was published by the Kenway Co., Calgary, under the title *Blood Red the Sun*.)

Cameron, in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post at Frog Lake, was the only survivor when the Plains Cree Indians of Big Bear's band massacred every white man in the settlement. His biography is both dramatic and historical, and though descriptions of the environment are few, they show Cameron's love of the wilderness. The wild and lonely environment of central Saskatchewan provides a romantic setting which heightens the excitement of the story.

Campbell, Marjory W. *The Saskatchewan*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1965.

A volume in the Rivers of America series which in broad outline narrates the history of the area adjacent to the river. (P.L. 71)

Cowie, Isaac. *The Company of Adventurers: a narrative of seven years in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company during 1867-1874 on the great buffalo plains*. Toronto: William Briggs, 1913.

A readable and valuable history of the fur trade as seen by a Hudson's Bay Co. servant at Qu'Appelle. Gives much information about what is now southern Saskatchewan. (Peel)

Gilbert, John. *Builders of the West*. Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1971.

Accounts of some of the people and events that shaped the history of western Canada. (P.L. 71)

Gray, James H. *Men Against the Desert*. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1967.

While doing research for his book *The Winter Years*, James Gray

James Gray

Photograph by Brian Schneider

Cottonwood Creek, near Lumsden

discovered that the Canadians found ways to protect their farms from deteriorating into sand-dunes and thus conquered the prairie drought. *Men Against the Desert* is a natural sequel to *The Winter Years*. (P.L. 71)

Gray, James H. *Red Lights on the Prairies*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1971.
An account of prostitution and the liquor trade in prairie towns from the earliest days to the 1920's. (P.L. 71)

Gray, James H. *The Winter Years*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1966.
A striking evocation of the feelings and thoughts of the people who endured the depression is created by James Gray. The author himself was on relief in the early years of the depression; later, he became a reporter for the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Informally written, it is an absorbing personal account and also a history which brings an understanding of the great impact of that era. (P.L. 71)

Hill, Douglas. *The Opening of the Canadian West: where strong men gathered*. Don Mills, Ontario: Longman's, 1973. (First Published in 1967.)
An account of the opening of the West with special tributes to the men who "tamed the wilderness." (P.L. 71)

Jefferson, Robert (1856-1934). *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan: being a history of the Cree Indian domestic life and the difficulties which led to serious agitation and conflict of 1885 in the Battleford locality*. Battleford: Canadian North-West Historical Soc., 1929. (Jefferson moved to Battleford, 1878; teacher on Red Pheasant reserve 1878-85; Poundmaker's prisoner during the Sask. Rebellion;

married Poundmaker's sister; later deputy Sheriff at Battleford and an employee of the provincial mental hospital.) (Peel)

Kennedy, Dan. *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.

The memories of 100-year-old Chief Dan Kennedy of the Carry the Kettle Reserve in Saskatchewan who remembers the coming of the first settlers and railroad. (P.L. 71)

Long, Phil S. *The Great Canadian Range.* Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963.

A personal and nostalgic story of ranch life in the last days of the open range in southwestern Saskatchewan. (P.L. 71) This work is an authentic account of life on the Cypress Hills cattle ranges during the First World War and the Twenties. It is nostalgic for the vanishing of "the cowboy and the open range and the wild carefree life." The author's love of the hill country is evident throughout, even as he tells of prairie fires, spring floods, winter blizzards, of trapping coyotes, and of the conversion of the range to farm land.

Lysenko, Vera. *Men in Sheepskin Coats, A Study of Assimilation.* Toronto: Ryerson, 1947.

A splendid study of the Ukrainians occupying the belt of farm land stretching from southeastern Manitoba to northwestern Alberta. Felt by some to be the best study published to date about any ethnic group in Canada. (P.L. 71)

Macdonald, John Stuart. *The Dominion Telegraph.* Battleford: Canadian North-West Historical Society, 1930.

This short but valuable historical document tells the story of the building and maintaining of the telegraph line from the Red

Saskatchewan Archives Photograph

Dan Kennedy

Photograph by James J. Lisitza

Winter sunlight, Dalmeny, Sask.

River to Edmonton. The workmen faced such problems as the presence of buffalo in the area, prairie fires, and great distances to be covered with only a primitive buckboard and single horse.

MacEwan, John Walter Grant. *Harvest of Bread*. Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1969.
The well-told and important story of the history of wheat on the Canadian Plains. MacEwan deals with environmental obstacles to wheat farming, such as drought, grasshoppers, rust, mice, wild birds, dust storms, prairie fires. A whole chapter is devoted to "coping with the weather," and a large section to the drought years and recovery. This is truly a story of the conquering of the earth and, to some extent, of climatic forces.

MacEwan, John Walter Grant. *Hoofprints and Hitching Posts*. Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1964.
A somewhat sentimental story of the important role of horses in opening the West for settlement and in cultivating the Plains.

MacGregor, James G. *Blankets and Beads: A History of the Saskatchewan River*. Edmonton: Applied Arts Products, 1949.
A popular and useful account of events, people and places associated with the Saskatchewan River from fur trade times to the period of settlement. (P.L. 71) It tells the story of explorers, of land and climate, of transportation, of people and events. The river's important role as the "North-West Passage" for exploration, fur trade, settlement, and missionary work is discussed.

Moorhouse, Arthur Herbert Joseph. *Deep Furrows*. Toronto & Winnipeg: G. J. McLeod Ltd., 1908.

Tells of pioneer trails along which the farmers of western Canada fought their way to great achievements in co-operation. A valuable record of the founding of the Grain Growers' Movement. (Peel)

Parsons, J.E. *West on the 49th Parallel: Red River to the Rockies, 1872-76*. New York, Morrow, 1963.

An interesting and well-illustrated account of the problems and vicissitudes of the British, American and Canadian surveyors in fixing our international boundary through largely unexplored country. Based primarily on previously unpublished documents, letters and diaries. (P.L. 71)

Peel, Bruce. *Steamboats on the Saskatchewan*. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, Western Producer, 1972.

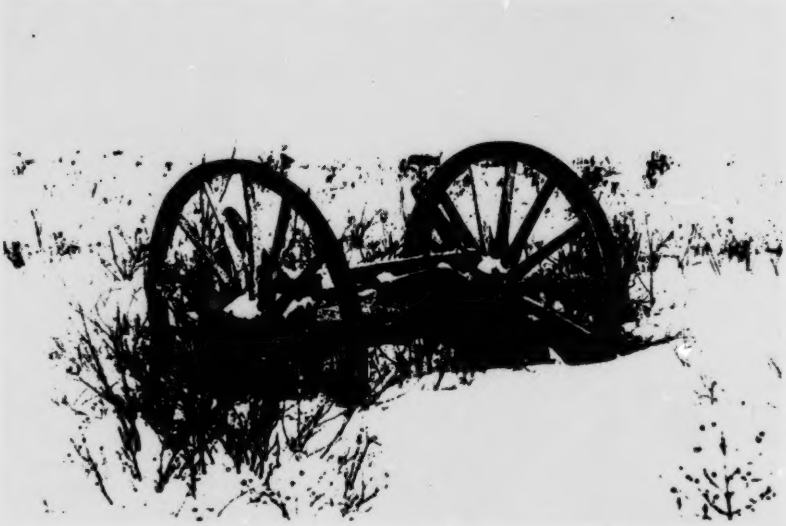
Ross, Eric. *Beyond the River and the Bay*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970.

This semi-fictional work brings to life the exciting landscape of the Canadian Northwest in the early nineteenth century, when the fur traders from the St. Lawrence clashed with their rivals from Hudson Bay. The book is based on an imaginary long-lost manuscript by Ian Alexander Bell Robertson entitled "Some Observations of the State of the Canadian Northwest in 1811." Robertson supposedly helped Lord Selkirk colonize the area by writing a description of the whole of the Northwest as it was prior to settlement--in its natural state.

Shaw, C. A. *Tales of a Pioneer Surveyor*. Don Mills, Ontario: Longman's, 1970.

Adventures and hardships surveying the route of the C.P.R. from Thunder Bay to the Selkirk Moutains. Edited by Raymond Hull. (P.L. 71)

Bruce Peel



Photograph by Zane Hernak

Wagon wheels, near Maple Creek, Sask.

Shepherd, George. *Brave Heritage*. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1967.
History of Saskatchewan from the days of Henry Kelsey to the author's own experiences of the life of homesteaders in the early 1900's. (P.L. 71) Shepherd homesteaded south of Maple Creek on the south slopes of the Cypress Hills, and he helped found the little community of West Plains.

Spence, Thomas. *The Saskatchewan Country of the North-West of the Dominion of Canada, presented to the world as a new and inviting field of enterprise for the emigrant and capitalist, its comparison as such with the western states and territories of America*. Montreal: Lovell Printing & Publishing Co., 1877.
An example of the exuberant and, at times, misleading advertising which lured thousands of hopeful emigrants to the Great Plains.

Tharp, Louise H. *Company of Adventurers: The Story of The Hudson's Bay Company*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1946.
Historical records and old diaries provide the background for this adventure story of the great fur trading company. (P.L. 71)

Watetch, A. *Payepot and His People*. Saskatchewan History and Folklore Society, 1959.
The story of a noted Cree chief and his people, written by one of them. (P.L. 71)

Weekes, Mary Loretto. *Great Chiefs and Mighty Hunters of the Western Plains: stories of daring and resourceful leadership of the Indian chiefs and scouts during the early settlement of the western prairies*. Regina: School Aids and Text Book Publishing Co. Ltd., 1947. (Peel)

D. EXPLORATION, TRAVEL AND ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Writings of explorers, travellers, and environmentalists provide a fairly complete view of the Saskatchewan Plains from the time of the first white men in the West. The travel classics of Sir William F. Butler, *The Great Lone Land* and *The Wild North Land*, tell of the spiritual and emotional effects of the Plains wilderness on those who saw it for the first time, in all its "dreary grandeur." Written to describe his great journeys across western Canada and into northern Saskatchewan, these works are somewhat romantic in tone, but nevertheless give a remarkably accurate picture of the variety of prairie landscape and of the nature of the true Great Plains. Like Palliser, Butler stresses the desolation of this environment and concludes that the forested areas to the north are more suitable for human settlement than the southern plains. Other significant early travellers who have left records of their impressions of the Plains are Samuel Hearne, James C. Southesk, and Sigurd Olson.

Grey Owl, Saskatchewan's most famous and enigmatic conservationist, wrote several books about the wilderness of the Canadian Shield. In these he deplored the economic practices which were damaging the environment and its wildlife. Moreover, he not only extolled the Indian mode of life, he adopted and lived it to the full. While Grey Owl is now known to have been an eccentric Englishman who posed as an Indian, and while his literary style seems rather quaint and florid today, his books are still accepted as sincere pleas for the preservation of wildlife and wilderness.

An important recent work of environmental literature in Saskatchewan is *The Last Refuge* by J. Gordon Nelson. This is an ecological history of the Great Plains during the crucial period 1750 to 1885 when the land, wildlife and native peoples of Saskatchewan were permanently changed by the white man's rise to power. Nelson focuses on the Cypress Hills area, the final, fragile refuge of the Plains Cree, the buffalo, and many animals and plants of the native prairie. This is a clear and disturbing account of the implications of man's ecological dominance of the Plains.

The definitive quide-book for those who travel Saskatchewan, or who simply want to know more about it, is Edward McCourt's *Saskatchewan*. It is based upon the author's knowledge of the Plains over many years as a resident, as a writer who grappled with this environment in many of his novels, and as one who travelled extensively throughout the Plains, the Parklands, and the rocky, forested Shield area to the north. The book is full of detailed descriptions of the landscapes of these three major regions, as well as of the history and culture of the people who settled them. Despite his explicit argument in this book that the land is neither barren nor dull, McCourt's personal view of Saskatchewan--the view implicit in much of his fiction--shows through again and again: that the Plains are inescapably hostile, partly because of their severe climate and partly because of their lack of that natural shelter which appears to be a primal human need.

Like so much of Saskatchewan literature, the works included in this section share a preoccupation with the human, psychological effects of the Plains. Perhaps more than other authors, explorers, travellers, and environmentalists were also specifically concerned with the white man's impact on the Plains, and in some cases, with his potential not only to exploit the land economically, but to disrupt it seriously in the process.

Butler, Sir William Francis. *The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North-West of America.* London: Sampson Low *et al.*, 1872.

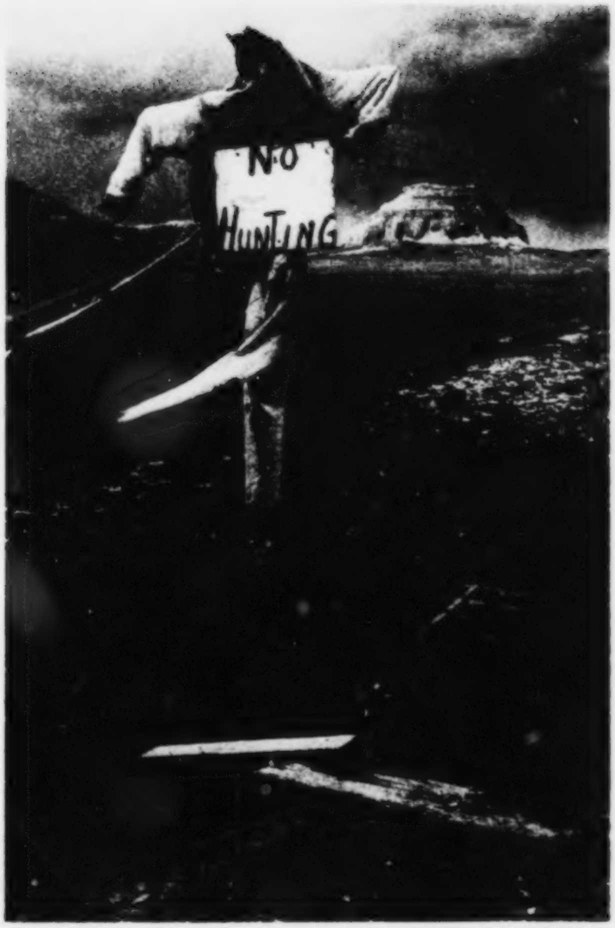
This work is one of the true travel classics of the West and the most valuable nineteenth-century commentary on the central Canadian Plains. It is highly recommended by Edward McCourt in his book *Saskatchewan* and is quoted by Wallace Stegner in *Wolf Willow* for its remarkable insights into the Plains environment and its effects on man. The work is an exciting tale of adventure, and a significant historical document.

The author, a British soldier, participated in the events of 1870 at Red River and was then sent on a special mission across the prairies to report on the smallpox epidemic which was raging among the Indian tribes (Peel). In *The Great Lone Land*, Butler describes his westward journey across Canada and devotes several chapters to the Great Plains. The title of the book suggests one of its major themes: the overwhelming loneliness of the wilderness areas of Canada, which Butler feels accounts for the greatness of the land. In his many eloquent descriptions of the land, Butler reveals himself as remarkably perceptive, open, and full of wonder. Though he is aware of its potential for man, Butler never views the land simply in terms of its exploitative value.

In his chapters on the Plains journey, the author provides a beautiful and now classic description of the Great Plains as an "inland ocean" of infinite variety and solitude. Butler belives that the vast expanses, the loneliness, the fierce climate of the Plains need not be threatening or oppressive. He views this environment as inspiring, often possessing religious overtones. He also comes to some perceptive conclusions about the fertility of the land and its aptness for human settlement. He comments favourably on the seasons

Public Archives of Canada Photograph

William Butler



Photograph by Brian Schneider

Castle Butte, Big Muddy

(while admitting that the cold of winter is intense) as well as on snowfall, frost, crops, grass and fishing. In contrast to many early Plains writers, Butler also shows immense sympathy for the plight of the North American Indians and respect for their natural harmony with the environment. The Indians, he says, have learned the varied languages of river, mountain and "measureless meadow," and thus may truly commune with Nature.

The Great Lone Land is essential reading for any student of the Canadian Plains.

Butler, Sir William Francis. *The Wild North Land; being the story of a winter journey; with dogs, across northern North America*. London: S. Low *et al.*, 1873.

This second great travel epic by Butler describes his journey to Lake Athabaska, and to the Pacific via the Peace River in 1872-73. The work was such an immediate success that by 1874 the publishers had brought out four editions. New editions were published in the U. S. A. in 1904 and 1922, and in Toronto in 1924 (Peel). Even now the book is not only an enthralling story of true adventure but is also one of the most definitive early studies of the Canadian wilderness and, in particular, of the Great Plains. Butler is capable of going beyond mere nature description to investigate the emotional and spiritual effects of an environment on man.

As in *The Great Lone Land*, Butler stresses the power and majesty of Nature and man's insignificance by contrast. For him the wilderness areas of Canada are timeless, immense, and overwhelming, while man is "a mere speck, powerless so far to mark his presence, in blur of smoke, in noise of city, in clash of crank, or whirl of wheel..." (p. 6). Not surprisingly, Butler was unable to foresee how the dominance of man over the wilderness would eventually threaten its very existence. Often when speaking of the wilderness, northern or prairie, Butler is awed by it: "lonely, silent, impassive, heedless of man, season, or time, the weight of the infinite seems to brood over it" (p. 22). In one particularly beautiful description of the moment following sunset, he speaks of how the "soul" of the wilderness is revealed.

Much of Butler's work is devoted to a discussion of the Great Plains area, and of the effects of its emptiness, solitude, and immensity. He painstakingly describes the vast panoramic view visible from a height of land at the forks of the Saskatchewan River, and attempts to explain the psychological effects of "endless space." From this point, he observes, the traveller may see two major environments of Canada: the great sub-arctic forests to the north and the "endless prairies of the middle continent" to the south (p. 36). However, Butler does not simply generalize about the Plains area; he devotes all of Chapter Seven to a discussion of the various types of prairie, each of which he describes in some detail. He names three "fertile" types of prairie and then discusses the "Great Prairie," the true great, flat, treeless plains of much of Saskatchewan. For Butler, the Great Prairie is one of the wonders of the earth, and stands forth "in dreary grandeur" over all other prairies:

> What the Irish sea...and the Mediterranean are to the Atlantic, so are these various outlying regions of plain to the vast rigid ocean of the central continent. (p. 49)

As in *The Great Lone Land*, Butler compares the Plains to the ocean in its immensity and its effects on man.

In this chapter the author provides an important catalogue of the features and effects of true prairie, with an emphasis on the loneliness and sense of smallness experienced by men crossing the Plains. He goes to great lengths to convey to the reader "a true picture of the sense of solitude, of endless space, of awful desolation which comes at times to the traveller's mind as he looks over some vast prairie and beholds a lonely herd of bisons trailing slowly across that snow-wrapt, endless expanse..." (p. 58). He is also vividly aware of seasonal changes on the Plains, and contrasts all other seasons with the "fierceness and utter desolation" of winter (p. 69). At that time, he says, one can form a true conception of life in these treeless wastes:

> ...then, midst fierce storm and biting cold, and snowdrift so dense that earth and heaven seem wrapped together in indistinguishable chaos, they will see a sight as different from their summer ideal as a mid-Atlantic mid-winter storm varies from a tranquil moonlight on the Aegean Sea. (p. 69)

Finally, Butler speaks with great sympathy for the Plains Indians and denounces the white view that they are nothing more than "the impediment to our progress" (p. 50). Amazingly for his time, Butler sees clearly how the slaughter of buffalo means the end of the Indian tribes.

This work seems to stress much more the *desolation* of the Plains than does his earlier work, *The Great Lone Land*. For example, in one revealing statement, Butler claims that the "grassy desert" is inhabited by only two wild creatures, the Indian and the bison. Moreover, his appendix to the book includes an interesting note on his view of the best route for a Canadian railroad to the Pacific Ocean. He feels that the projected route across the Eagle Hills is unsuitable, and recommends a line *north* of the North Saskatchewan River "as one best calculated to reach the country where rich soil, good water, and abundant wood for fuel and building can be easily obtained" (p. 363). Though over-awed by the Great Plains of Saskatchewan, Butler apparently felt that they were largely infertile and unsuitable for human settlement. In a very shortsighted statement which essentially echoes Palliser, Butler claims "it will yet be found that there are ten acres of fertile land lying *north* of the North Saskatchewan for every one acre lying south of it" (p. 364). He failed to visualize the establishment of the great wheatlands on the Plains which was just beginning in his time.

Butler's book, in spite of its errors, remains a classic of Canadian travel literature and one of the most important early examinations of the Prairie environment. The work is especially recommended for its sensitive re-creations of the Great Plains milieu before settlement and agriculture changed it forever.

Photograph by James J. Lisitza

A cultivated field

Saskatchewan Archives Photograph

Grey Owl

Grey Owl. *The Men of the Last Frontier*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1932.

This is the first book by George Stansfeld (Archie) Belaney, commonly known as Grey Owl, who emigrated to Canada in 1903 and became a trapper, guide and forest ranger. This is not a story of the Plains, in fact, but of the Great Shield frontier of north-central Canada; however, Grey Owl was distinguished as a nature lover and a conservationist, and as one who adapted completely to the Indian way of life in order to live close to the wilderness.

In spite of the validity of his views, Grey Owl's attitude towards the wilderness is often archaically romantic. He refers to the Shield country as "the Land of Shadows," which separates "the prosaic realities of a land of everyday affairs, and the enchantment of a realm of high adventure. . . ." Nevertheless, his knowledge of the land and its wildlife is unquestionable. He describes wild animals intricately and fondly, and deplores the materialism of man in the Shield. It is this "worship of the god of Mammon" which Grey Owl condemns as the greatest threat to the wilderness. He cites examples of destructive greed in the activities of lumber companies, in the beaver pelt trade, and, horrifyingly, in forest fires which he claims were set deliberately by men seeking work. In a similar context, he describes the greed and cruelty of the slaughter of buffalo on the Plains--a catastrophe which effectively "settled the Indian problem for all time."

The work also gives accounts of Grey Owl's journeys into the northland; of his instructions for one lost in the northern forests; of his promotion of conservation, particularly in the protection of the beaver; of the Indian way of life, which the author not only admired but adopted for the remainder of his life.

The Men of the Last Frontier is a classic of conservation literature; though somewhat dated and romantic, it speaks eloquently of the need for restraint and humility in the northern wilderness.

McCourt, Edward. *Saskatchewan*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1968.

McCourt's *Saskatchewan* was the first in a series of travel books about Canada, and is probably the best modern-day travel book on Saskatchewan available. McCourt is eminently suited to the task of describing Saskatchewan, for he lived in the province much of his life and in his many novels laboured to interpret the land and climate of the Plains and their effects on people. *Saskatchewan* is written out of the author's personal experience in his travels through the whole of the province and his knowledge of its history, topography, people and culture. The work has three sections corresponding to the major geographical divisions of the province: the Great Plains, the Parklands, and the Shield area. It provides a detailed and predominantly sympathetic view of the Plains, and of its social and natural history.

One of the most interesting, and puzzling, features of the book is McCourt's continual effort to defend the environment of the Great Plains. In his Prologue, entitled "The Land and the People," he discusses the inescapable effects of this so-called barren landscape on the people who live there. Although he strives to show that, for the sensitive observer, the landscape is pleasantly varied, he nevertheless seems to perceive this environment as more hostile than benevolent. McCourt explains clearly the key psychological effects of the Plains environment:

> ...Saskatchewan stands defenceless, no forest belt or mountain range along her flanks to hold the wind at bay. Nowhere else in the west does the stranger feel himself more exposed to the wrath of the gods and the fury of the elements than in the middle of the Saskatchewan prairie. (p. 5)

Yet the author also strives, with sympathy and knowledge, to dispel the misconception that the Saskatchewan landscape is characterless and dull. As in some of his novels, McCourt compares the human perception of the Plains to that of the desert or the ocean, in its communication of "sense of oneness on a cosmic scale" (p. 26). However, the defence of the Plains in this work seems inconsistent with those of McCourt's novels which virtually condemn the Plains as unfit for human life.

McCourt also shows how the personality and outlook of Saskatchewan people have been shaped by their harsh climate and barren landscape, and in particular by the dust-bowl years. Saskatchewan people, he claims, are "shaped by a sterner physical environment than that of most Canadians" (p. 7). They have made their own rules for survival and are suspicious of traditional values cherished in softer lands; they are less optimistic, more independent and more politically minded than their neighbours. McCourt drives home the effects of the harsh climate of the Plains on civilized man in a wonderful anecdote about Mr. Portingale--seemingly the gentlest, most unassuming little Englishman on earth. After being trapped by an unexpected winter blizzard on the open prairie, his team and sleigh immobilized, himself badly frost-bitten, the meek Mr. Portingale screamed abuse and defiance at the environment before his shocked rescuers. Prairie man, McCourt concludes, inevitably is "afflicted by a kind of nervous irritability which impels him to flail out in all directions" (p. 9). He is also alarmingly self-confident, "toughened by climate, inside and out" (p. 10)--although modern technology may bring about the passing of this typical prairie dweller.

In the first and longest section of the book, McCourt travels the Great Plains and discusses in depth the history, landscape, culture and points of interest of its various regions, from Moose Mountain and historic Cannington Manor in the east to the Cypress Hills in the southwest. Throughout, the author's perception of the Plains belies the rosy tribute of his Prologue, for he consistently views this immense land as bleak and harsh, where humans suffer from a kind of exposure--both physical and psychological--due to the total absence of natural shelter. For example, McCourt describes the country around Estevan as

> ...unbelievably cruel--drought-tormented, dust-ridden, wind-battered, it has driven many men and women to despair and some to madness; for here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the west, a man feels himself exposed to the menace of inscrutable and awful powers, with no mountains or hills to hide him from the heavy wrath of God. (p. 38)

A particularly fascinating passage in this section is a long, almost poetic description of the psychological effects of the "seas of earth," as experienced on the Plains south of Weyburn. Here, the feelings are of aloneness, peace, and awe at the immense scale of the environment.

Not surprisingly, the Cypress Hills area is, for McCourt, the most beautiful and companionable region of the province by virtue of its "kindly sheltering hills." The human need for shelter, variety and colour in the environment is fully satisfied in these "Hills of Refuge," where man can retreat from the burning plains. On the other hand, McCourt describes the site of Regina on the Great Plains as though it were the most uncongenial and improbable spot on earth for a territorial capital. The desolate, featureless prairie, the complete lack of trees (except for those planted by man), the abominable gumbo soil, make Regina "one of the bleakest spots in the whole west" (p. 84). McCourt praises the achievement of Regina's citizens who have made such a spot livable.

Chapters 9 to 14 deal with the Parklands of Saskatchewan, and focus on the Qu'Appelle Valley, Saskatoon, and the "melting-pot" of east-central Saskatchewan, as well as on such historical events as the Riel Rebellion, the ill-starred trek of the Barr colonists, and the founding of Battleford as the first capital of the Northwest.

McCourt often speaks of the hardships suffered by the pioneers in a harsh environment:

> ...for the pioneer settlers who first came to grips with the terrifying immensity of a world such as the Canadian prairies--a harsh raw world which left them naked to the at best indifferent and at worst savagely hostile forces of nature--those early years must have provided as great a share of heartbreak as of exaltation. (p. 122)

In the book's final chapters on the Saskatchewan northland, the author stresses that the wild character of the Shield environment is not conducive either to tourist pleasures or to the romantic aspirations of the tenderfoot. He describes the three routes into the north, the problem of loneliness in the overwhelming immensity of the north woods, the splendour of its scenery, and he tells the stories of Grey Owl's life at Lake Ajawaan and of the abortive canoe journey down the Churchill by a naively romantic Sinclair Lewis. McCourt's observations on human perceptions of the northland are most valuable. For example, he compares the sensations of driving for several hours through dense forest to "a marathon underwater swim" and argues that, for him, "a forest environment is not only physically oppressive, but mentally inhibiting" (p. 194). Like most people conditioned to the emptiness of the Great Plains, McCourt is uncomfortable in this enclosed environment. He acknowledges the general principle that the effects of early conditioning may determine a person's reaction to any given environment. Thus, for those who grow up in the north, "the forest is a womb from which they are terrified to come out" (p. 200).

In his Epilogue, McCourt reaches philosophical conclusions about the paradoxically intimate relation between Saskatchewan man and his great and savage environment. The central importance of agriculture in the province ensures a continuing bond between man and the land. Moreover, the environment of the Plains offers the sensitive countryman the means to self-knowledge:

> Nowhere, I think, is it possible for man to know better his littleness and greatness--that is, to know better himself. For this is a world which objectifies the great words, birth and love and death and God and eternity, casts them in a scale that exalts their grandeur and diminishes their terror. (p. 233)

McCourt's *Saskatchewan* is without doubt the most valuable study of the province and of the nature of the Plains environment written in our time.

Nelson, J. Gordon. *The Last Refuge*. Montreal: Harvest House, 1973.

The Last Refuge is one of a series of books on various important aspects of the Canadian environment. It is primarily an ecological history of the Great Plains of North America during the crucial period 1750-1885. Its emphasis is on landscape changes and the lasting, often destructive effects on wildlife and native populations of the white man's economy: the fur trade; the mining, ranching, and farming frontiers; and the railroad. The accelerating pace of change since the white man's arrival is stressed, as are present threats to the natural character of the remaining refuge, the Cypress Hills.

The "last refuge," therefore, is the Cypress Hills area which extends through Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana, for it was here that the plains Indian, the buffalo on which he depended, and the natural ecosystem of which he was a part, finally retreated from the white man's devastation. In the first part of the book (Chapters 1 to 10), the author traces the history of the fur traders and other travellers as they moved up the Missouri and Saskatchewan rivers. He also presents evidence on their ways of life, attitudes, hunting methods, fires and so on, all of which have affected the ecosystem. In the second part of the book (Chapters 11 to 15), Nelson provides a critical discussion and interpretation of this historical record, with reference to wildlife, landscape and the Plains Indian. He devotes a large section to the irreversible decline of the bison, the beaver and the grizzly.

This work is the most important ecological history of Saskatchewan. It presents a disturbingly clear view of the rise of man to ecological dominance on the Plains, and of the serious implications of that dominance for the environment.

Supplementary Bibliography:
Exploration, Travel and Environment

Anscott, W. H. *Down a Wet Highway*. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, The Western Producer, 1969.

Journey by motor boat down the South Saskatchewan River from Red Deer to Saskatoon in 1966. (P.L. 71)

Buchanan, Angus. *Wild Life in Canada*. London: J. Murray, 1920.

A canoe trip from Prince Albert to Reindeer Lake in the autumn of 1914. (Peel)

Buchanan was a Scottish naturalist and explorer who came to Canada in 1906 and worked as an architect in Regina. He later joined a zoological expedition to the Barren Lands, during which he collected specimens for the Saskatchewan government. His book is the fascinating account of that expedition.

Coplen, H. *Saskatchewan Sportsman's Gourmet Guide*. Saskatchewan Centennial Corporation, 1968.

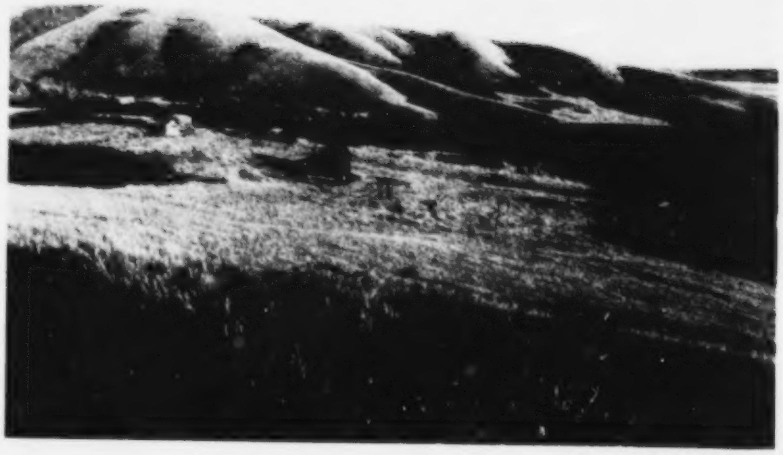
Includes descriptions, locations and recipes of native fruit, fish, game birds and game animals. (P.L. 71)

Grey Owl. *Adventures of Sajo and Her Beaver People*. London: L. Dickson & Thompson, 1935.

A simple story of two Indian children and the daily lives of their animal friends. Based largely on the author's experiences in northern Saskatchewan, where he established a world-wide reputation with his work in beaver conservation. (P.L. 71)

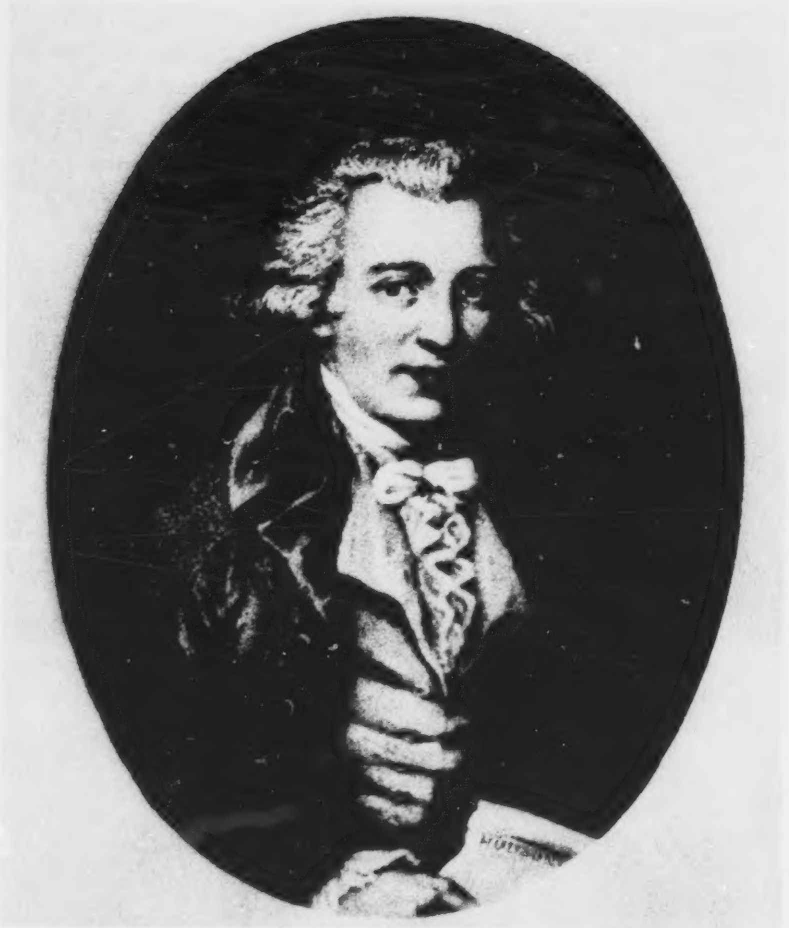
Grey Owl. *Tales of an Empty Cabin*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1936.

The experiences and observations of the nature lover and conservationist, relating in part to northern Saskatchewan (P.L. 71)



Photograph by Brian Schneider

Qu'Appelle Valley, near Katepwa



Samuel Hearne

Hearne, Samuel. *Journals of Samuel Hearne and Philip Turnor.* Edited with introduction and notes by J. B. Tyrrell. Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1934.

Hearne's journals cover his penetration of the interior in 1774-75, and the building of Cumberland House, the first permanent establishment of the Hudson's Bay Co. in the interior. Turnor's journals include his surveys in the Saskatchewan-Athabaska region. Peter Fidler's journal covers his wanderings in 1791-92 from Lake Athabaska to Great Slave Lake. (Peel)

McCourt, Edward A. *The Road Across Canada.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1965.

Impressions, both favourable and adverse, of Canadian scenery, places and people. The work was the result of a journey across Canada by car, from the Maritimes to the Pacific, and includes a sympathetic and perceptive chapter on Saskatchewan.

Macdonald, R. H. *Four Seasons West: A Photographic Odyssey of the Three Prairie Provinces.* Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1975.

This book is a highly individual view of the Canadian Plains seen by a photographer who was challenged "to show that there is indeed beauty on the prairies." This collection of striking full-colour photographs is the result of over 25 years of travel and search. Includes brief but sensitive essays by the author.

MacEwan, John W. Grant. *Entrusted to My Care.* Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1966.

The author, a westerner, shows deep concern for the conservation of prairie land in western Canada, which is being threatened by

the era of pollution and industrialization. (P.L. 71)

Olson, Sigurd F. *The Lonely Land*. New York: Knopf, 1961.
This true adventure story describes a journey by canoe down the great Churchill River fom Ile-A-La-Crosse to Cumberland House, in which the author followed the trail of the Canadian voyageurs. The Shield area with its wilderness of lakes, free rivers, and rocks is described intricately and was clearly exhilarating for the travellers involved. The land is "lonely" only because most of it is unsettled: it is "one of the few places left on the North American Continent where men can see the country as it was before Europeans came and know some of the challenge and freedoms of those who saw it first...."

Southesk, James Carnegie, Earl of. *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains*. Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas; Toronto: James Campbell & Son, 1875.
A diary and narrative of travel, sport, and adventure during a journey through the Hudson's Bay Company's territories, in 1859 and 1860. (P.L. 71)
This classic of early western travel literature is highly recommended by Edward McCourt in his modern-day travel book, *Saskatchewan*.

Warkentin, J. (editor). *The Western Interior of Canada--A Record of Geographical Discovery, 1612-1917*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964.
Excerpts from the journals and reports of explorers and travellers. (P.L. 71)

Whillans, James W. *First in The West*. Applied Arts Products, 1955.
A summary of available evidence regarding the life of Henry Kelsey, the first white man on the prairies, and an investigation of his route. (P.L. 71)

E. BIOGRAPHY AND MEMOIR

Introduction

The biographies and memoirs included in this section are rich with observations of real human lives on the Plains, and for this reason may be the most useful indicators of the relation of man and environment in Saskatchewan. There is something here for everyone--from the bittersweet, comical memoirs of Max Braithwaite to the profound musings of the elderly Robert Symons. These writers explore many themes, most notably that of the child growing up on the Plains, and the land and climate function powerfully as shapers of character and of lifestyles. A few authors, like Wallace Stegner and Robert Symons, are absorbed in the way in which men have shaped and even seriously disrupted their environment. There is an added bonus for the reader: the works of Stegner and, possibly, of Braithwaite, which have enjoyed considerable popularity, are certainly among the finest Saskatchewan writings so far produced.

This "guide-book" will be a success if it serves only to induce people to read Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*, a classic of Plains literature. Stegner is a masterful writer, and in *Wolf Willow* he combines personal memoir with history and fiction to give a composite view of the human presence in the Cypress Hills area. He is deeply committed to an understanding of the natural, environmental forces which have permanently shaped his character and his life as well as the community in which he lived as a boy. Unlike Robert Symons, who projects a view of the Plains environment as all good, Stegner sees it as ambivalent, unquestionably hostile and bleak, yet uniquely beautiful. Stegner's best-known short stories, "Genesis" and "Carrion Spring," are included in the final section of *Wolf Willow*.

Although highly realistic presentations of the deadly winter of 1906 to 1907 in southwest Saskatchewan, these stories are also parables of the human struggle on the Plains, in which the lesson seems to be in the need for inner strength and a few essential laws of co-operation among men.

The two works by Max Braithwaite discussed here are companion pieces dealing with the author's life during the wretched dust-bowl years in Saskatchewan. Like Stegner, he explores the human struggle to survive, but with remarkable wit and humour, as well as compassion for the tormented farm people. Braithwaite is able to laugh at himself and at an environment which he clearly detested, and he is drawn to the conclusion that this land's most positive feature is its people. Similarly, in Lloyd Person's *Growing Up in Minby*, it is the characters of a prairie village which give the land its colour. Seen through the eyes of an adolescent boy, the Plains environment is dull and characterless, a land to be tolerated but never enjoyed. Person exposes the predator habit of mind among prairie people as a hard fact of life, particularly in their merciless wars against the lowly gopher. Quite a different cause is promoted by Robert Symons, who was a true naturalist devoted to the ideal of country life in harmony with the environment. In his reminiscences of his ranching days in the Cypress Hills, of homesteading west of Saskatoon, and of his retirement life at Silton, Symons sees himself as a creature among creatures, never as the dominant species. Along with his sensitive and detailed observations of the environment, Symons presents his own arguments against the evils of technological civilization, especially when it encroaches upon the countryman's domain. His emotional pleas for environmental protection are similar to those of Grey Owl, Saskatchewan's naturalist *par excellence*. The story of Grey Owl's conversion to Indian life, and later from trapping to conservation, is told by Lovat Dickson in *Wilderness Man*.

Finally, the story of Norbert Welsh, a Saskatchewan Métis who was one of the last important buffalo hunters on the Plains, is told in *The Last Buffalo Hunter*. This work is remarkable for its eyewitness account of both the human and environmental catastrophe which followed the end of the great buffalo herds.

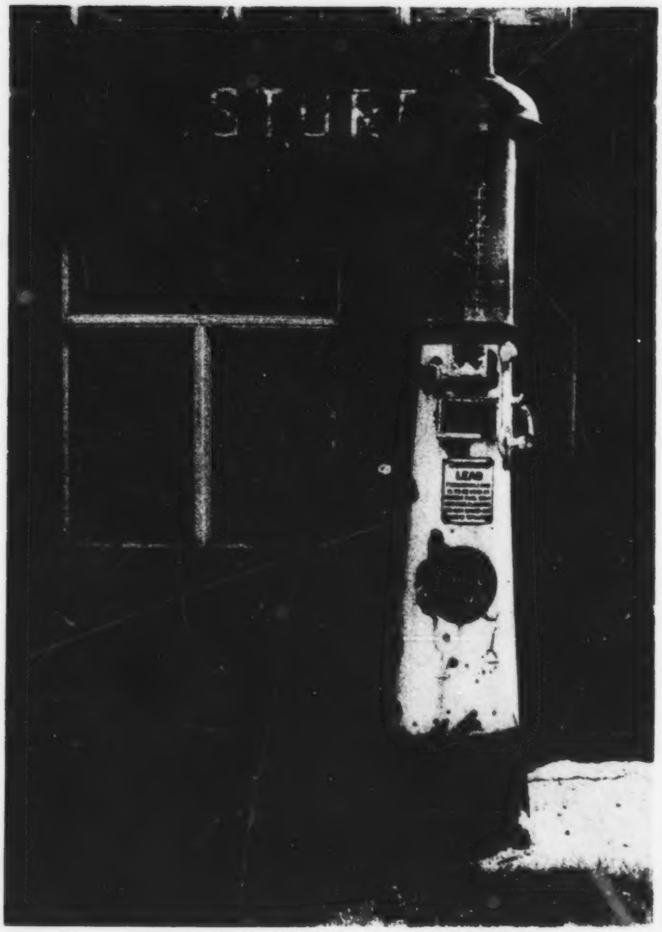
Not surprisingly, the biographies and memoirs of Saskatchewan people cannot escape the influence of the Plains environment; on the contrary, most authors seem compelled to explore the effect of this country on human character. And, on the whole, they concur with Edward McCourt's view that Saskatchewan people have been toughened by a sterner physical environment than that of most Canadians.

Braithwaite, Max. *The Night We Stole the Mountie's Car.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971.

This work is a continuation of the humorous memoirs which Braithwaite presented in *Why Shoot the Teacher*, and accounts for the years 1935 to 1945, the period in which the author began his career as a writer. He relates with humour and perception his life as a school vice-principal in the town of Wannego, Saskatchewan, and his often blundering but persistent efforts to write and be published. Braithwaite is preoccupied, above all, with people and with human events in a small prairie town during the thirties; he is particularly adept at revealing the idiosyncrasies, follies, strengths and weaknesses of others and himself. His few comments on the Plains environment and climate are subordinate to the human themes of this book, but they serve to reveal the author's unquestionable distaste for his surroundings. The work is refreshing because Braithwaite can at least laugh at Saskatchewan and at his own distressing attempts to flourish creatively during a time of depression and drought.

Braithwaite's dream of becoming a professional writer was partly connected to his underlying revulsion for Saskatchewan. Once he established himself as a writer, his only desire would be "to get to hell out of Saskatchewan altogether" and to "reverse the actions of my dad when he came West some forty-odd years earlier to make his fortune" (p. 11). Here and elsewhere, Braithwaite makes an incisive comment on the generation which followed the original settlers in Saskatchewan: the Plains were not for them a "Promised Land" but often a place devoid of beauty and of opportunity. Even when Braithwaite proposed to his wife, the bargain involved eventually taking her away from the area to a "fine house beside a lake within driving distance of a big city

Max Braithwaite



Photograph by Dave Novak

Out of Business, Frank Lake, Sask.

where there will be plays and concerts and movie houses. . ." (p. 12). Furthermore, the author seems at pains to avoid references to the devastated Plains during the height of the drought; there is only a passing mention of dry fields, grasshoppers, drifted dust, the general bleakness. Braithwaite concentrates on the human results of the dust-bowl years, when desperate schoolteachers had to lie their way into jobs, when farmers and bankers were bitter enemies, and when loose change in one's pocket was a luxury. The author's own escape route was in a literary career, designed "to lift me from the dry windy cold barren prairies to the fertile warm literary fields of Toronto or New York" (p. 49).

A few episodes in this work have perceptive insights into the human effects of environment. For example, the author describes the verdant landscaping around the town's most impressive house as a remarkable achievement on the dry Plains. The large green lawns and flowering shrubs were "a bit of the green and grace of southern Ontario" recreated on the "bleak and dust-ridden prairie" (p. 77). Braithwaite also tells how he and his wife enjoyed their new house on the edge of town because in spring they were at the edge of an immense slough, with frog choruses and box-elders to relieve the general drabness. One anecdote concerns a man who was the local "weed inspector," during a time when trying to eradicate weeds in Saskatchewan "was like trying to combat mosquitoes in a swamp with a fly swatter" (p. 161). The author makes an interesting comment on the proliferation of Russian thistle in particular, and its horrendous effects on the wheat crop. Braithwaite's most thorough discussion of environment and climate comes during a story about winter pastimes, when he describes in detail the peculiarities of each month of winter. Plains dwellers will appreciate his view that March can be the worst month of the year in Saskatchewan because its thaws are often deceptive, "dirty little tricks" followed by terrible cold and storms (p. 178). Braithwaite's description of the miseries of March blizzards on the Plains is the most accurate I have read anywhere.

The author's closing words in *The Night We Stole the Mountie's Car* neatly sum up his attitude towards the Plains environment of Saskatchewan. Once he had become a professional writer at the end of the war, he moved to Ontario and made Ontario his home. At first he had bitter memories of "the cold, dust storms, poverty and indifference" of the prairies. In time, however, these became fond memories because, for him, "the great compensating factor of the plains is the people. Like the climate they are harsh at times, gentle at others, but never dull" (p. 220). For Braithwaite the humanist, even the terrible barrenness of the Plains in the Thirties could be alleviated by the human factor, which he sees as always rich and varied.

Braithwaite, Max. *Why Shoot the Teacher*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965.

Why Shoot the Teacher is an entertaining and truthful recollection of the author's year as a young school teacher in rural Saskatchewan during the dust-bowl days of the Thirties. Its most remarkable achievement is its tone of sympathy and its witty humour in spite of a subject which would inspire only bitterness and despair in most. Braithwaite is seldom bitter as he recalls the desolate land and the cruelty of drought which were, in fact, his greatest enemies. The basic struggle which he relates is his fight against loneliness in an isolated country school on the bleak Plains; the basic theme which he explores is the meaning of isolation and its effects on the human soul. His book is full of vivid and perceptive examinations of the Plains environment during the Depression, along with penetrating comments on the effects of land and climate on the people who lived there.

The setting for Braithwaite's memoir is the Plains area about twenty miles from "Bleke, Sask.," described as "a tiny oasis of futility on a barren sea of despair" (p. 2). For Braithwaite, this semi-arid region that lies on the Saskatchewan-Alberta border, an environment of slightly rolling, treeless, curly-grass country, is quite simply desolate, unsuitable for wheat farming and virtually unfit for human life. Yet here he must live, alone and in the basement of the country school (which he compares to the Black Hole of Calcutta) without a house or a tree visible in any direction. Moreover, he must survive physically on the most meagre supply of essential food and fuel, and he must survive mentally in spite of terrible loneliness and the often futile task of educating children whose parents understandably view education as a contemptible frivolity during hard times. The story of his survival and his ultimate defeat by environmental forces after only one year is told in *Why Shoot the Teacher*.

In one chapter the author makes an important comment on education in Saskatchewan, in which his views are essentially identical to those of Wallace Stegner in *Wolf Willow*. He observes that the material studied by school children teaches them nothing about their own environment, history or culture. He is particularly scornful of the imported, eastern Canadian or European literature on which the children are fed, literature which is totally unrelated to the Plains environment:

> Poems and stories about babbling brooks, towering mountains, soaring larks, apples in orchards, the glory of the crimson maple leaf were lost to youngsters who had never seen these things. And not a word in all our reading about purple crocuses carpeting the prairie in spring, Hungarian partridges shooting out of the stubble like pellets from a gun, frozen sloughs..., wolf willow, gophers...or the coyote's sad wail at night. (p. 49)

(It is interesting that, aside from a later description of the joys of spring on the prairies, the above passage is Braithwaite's only wholly positive description of the Plains.) The author goes on to observe, rather astutely, that the children of the Plains gain their lasting education not in school but on the land, and that what they lack in culture they make up for in "toughness of mind and body" (p. 49). Children raised in the Plains climate can take being cold, wet, weary and frost-bitten. While their bodies are strong, their minds are also necessarily toughened to the fact that life is a battle and to survive at all each one must think faster and with more cunning than the next fellow. Braithwaite also points out how the battle for survival on the drought-stricken land is linked to a contempt for education. One pupil's father, an impoverished farmer, classed the weather, bad prices, mortgage companies, government and the school as enemies. In his view, education was not "worth a tinker's damn" to his kids because it did not teach them how to plough, disc, seed or harvest the land (p. 68). The author, however, manages to convey this pathetic attitude with a remarkable sympathy for the tormented, baffled Plains farmer whose only concern could be bare survival.

A particularly revealing chapter tells the story of Alice Field, a British war bride who came to Saskatchewan after the first World War. Apparently near madness with boredom and loneliness, she leaves her farmer-husband and children during a blizzard and stumbles upon the school-house. Her emotional plight is reminiscent of that of Norah Armstrong in McCourt's *Home Is the Stranger*, in that her tragic inability to adapt to a hostile and alien land has resulted in her moral and emotional collapse. After describing her British home with its great oaks and companionable landscape, Alice recalls her first horrified impressions of the Saskatchewan farm:

> When I saw it, I could have cried. No brook. No tree.
> Not anywhere in sight. And the house with no paint....
> And all around just the prairie. (p. 104)

Her victimization by the environment is worsened by her horror at her husband's casual cruelty; on the Plains, he has learned to love killing, and seems happiest when drowning kittens, poisoning gophers, or shooting coyotes. Her explanation for this sadistic habit of mind suggests the most negative effect of the Plains on man: "it's such a cruel life and maybe a man has to be cruel to survive" (p. 108).

The author himself makes a related observation when he discusses the evolution of the game of hockey. He sees it as a product of Canadian geography and Canadian temperament, "an expression of the constant fight against mean climate and conditions" (p. 116). And the best players (presumably the toughest and meanest) come from either the Canadian shield or the Plains--areas of Canada where life is hardest.

Throughout the book Braithwaite provides many brilliant insights into this unique environment and its effects on people. He describes the "rioting" life of spring in vivid detail and shows how difficult is the job of keeping young minds on school work during this time (p. 118). He outlines the vagaries of weather in March and April, when hopes are raised and dashed by freak blizzards and eventually by the "black blizzards of spring"--dust storms (p. 122). He describes dust storms, grasshoppers and Russian thistle as the most hateful aspects of the drought. With particularly penetrating insight, he shows how the Bennett Buggy was symbolic of the depression on the Plains: the degradation of the automobile was "proof of what the environment could still do" to the pioneers (p. 126). In one of the most comical episodes in the book, the author describes his misadventures with a tame coyote which is forced upon him as a pet. The first night with his new pet provides lively slap-stick, as Braithwaite lies awake listening to the coyote as he catches mice in the basement quarters and eats them with loud chomps. The author is at first puzzled by the hatred of local farmers for the coyote, for he sees them as "two of a kind," both products of a harsh and lonely environment (p. 142). The coyote and the Plains farmer, he says, are both "suspicious, lean, hungry, full of natural guile, and furiously independent," as a result of their struggle to survive on the Plains. Like R. D. Symons, Braithwaite can see the folly of man's war against a creature which is, in fact, his best friend; the coyote's principal food is mice, gophers, rabbits and sometimes rattlesnakes.

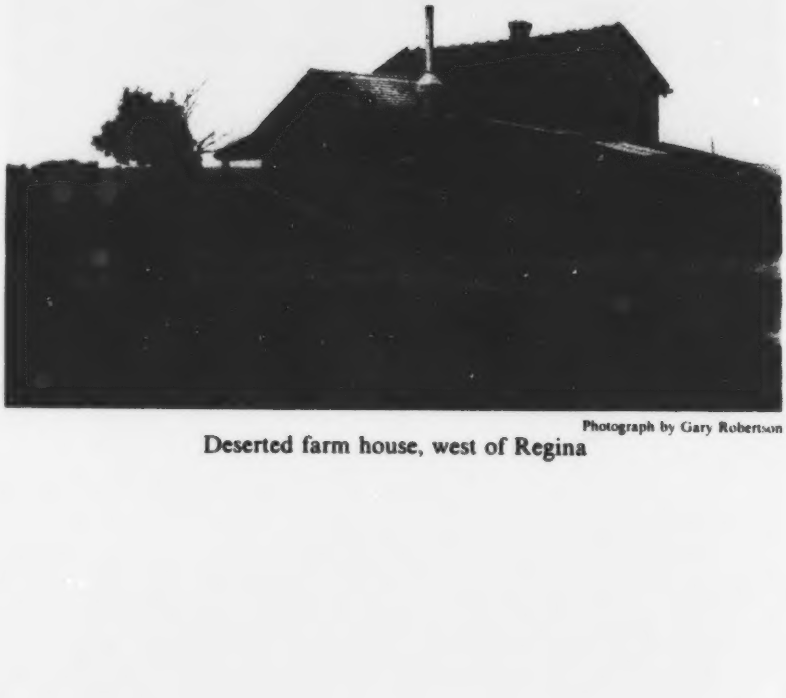
Though the young Braithwaite loses his battle against loneliness and is forced to leave the bleak Plains after one year, he does not lose either his sense of humour or his compassion for the tormented wheat farmers in their struggle. His book describing that strange year is fun to read and is full of insights into the psychological and social effects of the harsh Plains environment. The element of laughter in Braithwaite's work makes it an unusual product of Saskatchewan's dust-bowl years.

Dickson, Lovat. *Wilderness Man: The Strange Story of Grey Owl.*
Toronto: Macmillan, 1973.

Wilderness Man is a highly praised biography of the almost legendary Grey Owl, who lived for seven years in Prince Albert National Park (1931-38) until he died at the age of fifty. Dickson's biography is said to be the most thorough on Grey Owl; certainly, it is very readable.

Dickson tells the story of Grey Owl's remarkable careers, of his journeys to live in various wilderness spots in Canada, of his momentous conversion from trapper to conservationist, and of his special kinship with all wild creatures. The author is particularly interested in the motives behind the transformation of Archie Belaney, Englishman, into a half-breed Indian who ardently adopted the Indian way of life. The work also tells of Grey Owl's popular and moving nature books; of Grey Owl the showman, on lecture tours in Britain; of his seeming success, and of the depression and exhaustion which killed him.

Grey Owl's most important achievement was as a conservationist and gifted writer able to influence great numbers of people. After twenty years of trapping, and influenced by his Mohawk wife, Anahareo, Grey Owl rejected the barbarities of trapping and dedicated his life to the protection of wilderness and wild creatures. He became sickened by the constant butchery by trappers, especially by the "get-rich-quick" trappers who use cruel methods in their haste and greed. Grey Owl's writings reveal his passionate love for the Canadian wilderness. Lovat's biography presents Grey Owl's achievement as a myth-maker who called modern man's attention to a world he has all but lost.



Photograph by Gary Robertson

Deserted farm house, west of Regina

Lloyd Person

Person, Lloyd H. *Growing Up in Minby.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1974.

Growing Up in Minby is a lively, often humorous collection of semi-fictional sketches of a young boy's life in the small Saskatchewan town of Minby. The narrator of the sketches is the middle-aged Wally Viggo, a son of the village blacksmith, and he tells of the years 1928-30 when Wally was a boy of 10 or 11. Through the mature hindsight of the older narrator, we look back upon his lively boyhood as well as upon a way of life on the Plains which has all but disappeared. Person writes that the town of Minby "is a composite of many vanishing or already vanished prairie villages. You'll find it nowhere or everywhere on the prairie maps." Based in part on the author's own boyhood in Aylesbury, Saskatchewan, the book is above all an imaginative social document which focuses on the individual personalities which made up a prairie town of the late Twenties.

Because of the central human concerns of the book, it contains few references to the Plains environment which certainly helped to shape the lives of the townspeople. Allusions to the Plains are often brief and perfunctory, reflecting the main character's view that the "bald prairie" is too dull to warrant close observation or description. Even though the young Wally ventures out onto the Plains, in solitary walks or as part of a Bible Camp, he is far less interested in the environment itself than in whatever it might reveal about human life and endeavour. When the narrator does speak of the Plains, however, his comments genuinely reflect prairie society's often peculiar perceptions of the environment as it was in a small Saskatchewan town in the late Twenties.

In a way similar to Max Braithwaite, Lloyd Person seems to view the Plains as a land to be tolerated and sometimes battled--but never to be enjoyed. Its dullness is emphasized in the book's opening pages. For Wally Viggo, summer in Minby "was hot and dry, yellow-brown or straw-colored rather than green, for there was little grass anywhere" (p. 2). Even the new Pool elevators are as ugly as "inverted hemorrhoids sticking up against the prairie horizon" (p. 10). American landlords are lucky enough to visit the Plains only to put in their crops and leave at the first sign of cold weather (p. 23). In a later chapter entitled "The Hideaway," Wally tells how he loved to walk in the country, yet demonstrates that it is simply walking which he enjoys and not, in fact, the countryside itself. It is significant that he usually walks along country roads because he knows the farmers and hopes for the occasional ride with a team and wagon. On one trek along the edge of a valley, he finds the terrain simply "dry and dull, " and this monotony is relieved only by his discovery of a crude shelter dug out of a hillside and carefully camouflaged by the Minby railroad gang who frequented the "hideaway." The young Wally's delight in this "cosily sheltered haven" (p. 161) is in sharp contrast to his boredom with the surrounding landscape. Perhaps the hideaway is symbolic of the shelter and human warmth needed by Wally to escape the dreaded exposure of the Plains, with its indifferent sameness, its summer heat and winter blizzards. Not too surprisingly, we learn in the "Epilogue" that Wally's family is later forced to escape the Plains altogether, during what his father called the "bad years" of the Thirties.

Another environmental theme which emerges in this book is linked to the narrator's attitude towards hunting, an activity which he views matter-of-factly, at times callously, as a way of life on the Plains. In the opening pages he describes his youthful shock at the sight of great, frozen moose carcasses on the Minby train, the kill of two Minbyites who had been "up North" hunting. One of the moose heads is eventually stuffed and displayed in the town Pool Room--ridiculously adorned with a bell. Yet Wally's implicit distaste for this business does not seem to last. In a chapter entitled "Economics," he describes his own fervour for poisoning gophers in order to collect the three-cent bounty on their tails. As in so much prairie literature, the heartless extermination of the gopher is viewed as an essential, even delightful rite of boyhood. Because the gopher is "economically important" as an eater of grain, the boy can apparently justify in his own mind his cruelty and his mercenary motives.

Similarly, Wally recalls rather nostalgically how his father hunted prairie birds illegally out of season, apparently as a sort of personal flouting of the great forces of both law and environment. Although Mr. Viggo was a farmer as well as a townsman, he did not bother to justify his actions in terms of the destruction of his crops by the birds or the infringement of city hunters on his property during hunting season. His unthinking view of the farmer's natural mastery over all Plains creatures may be distasteful, but it is certainly not unusual. Wally and his father reflect the prevailing moral code of their time.

The most notable features of *Growing Up in Minby* are its wonderful presentation of an array of characters and its insight into the surprisingly complex society of a small prairie town. Only incidentally and perhaps unconsciously does the book reveal the oppressive effect of the Plains environment on its various characters. For the narrator the true colour and variety in life are to be found mainly in the eccentricities of human beings, not in the dull and expressionless Plains environment.

Stegner, Wallace. *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier*. New York: Viking Press, 1966.

Probably the finest work ever written by a Saskatchewan native about Saskatchewan, *Wolf Willow* is already a modern classic of Plains literature. While it seems a complex work, combining autobiography with history and fiction, the past with the present, childhood memories with adult wisdom, *Wolf Willow* achieves a unified and harmonious vision of human life on the remote frontier of the Cypress Hills. Within the autobiographical frame of the first and last sections, Stegner traces the history of the Cypress Hills region and, in two excellent stories, recreates the ordeal by weather on the western plains during the winter of 1906. The entire work is an important testament of the varying effects of environment on the human personality and emotions, because Stegner strives to understand the peculiar power of the Plains environment over its human inhabitants. Moreover, *Wolf Willow* is beautifully written, an unusually sensitive and moving memoir of a boyhood and a place.

The work's most important statements about man and environment are made in the opening three chapters, through Stegner's mature reflections as he returns to the land and the town of his boyhood in southwestern Saskatchewan. He states the blunt truth about the Plains environment--it is above all bleak, hostile, unromantic--yet he also acknowledges its powerful hold over him through childhood conditioning. Its main features, he observes, are violent weather, frightening emptiness, and wind; it is a lonely, unromantic country which few people wish to cross, much less visit. Yet while Stegner admits that "Saskatchewan can be a pretty depressing country" (p. 5), his adult mind is capable of responding to the uniqueness and the true variety of this land:

Wallace Stegner

Photograph by Zane Hersak

Soil and snow drifting, near Swift Current

> The plain spreads southward below the Trans-Canada Highway, an ocean of wind-troubled grass and grain. It has its remembered textures: winter wheat heavily headed, scoured and shadowed as if schools of fish move in it; spring wheat with its young seed-rows as precise as combings in a boy's wet hair; gray-brown summer fallow with the weeds disked under; and grass, the marvellous curly prairie wool tight to the earth's skin, straining the wind as the wheat does, but in its own way, secretly. (p. 6)

The adult Stegner perceives this country not as characterless, but as *overpowering*. Its immense sky, its hazeless atmosphere, its stark horizon, the "hugeness of simple forms," give it a quality of "awful perfection" (p. 7). In its good moments, he adds, the Plains environment is beautiful, "the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all the senses" (p. 8). The striking poetic quality of Stegner's essay is a product of the highly imaginative language with which he so skilfully evokes the character of the Plains.

Stegner puts forward the primary environmental theme of *Wolf Willow* in these early pages. As he re-enters the valley and the town ("Whitemud") of his childhood, he reflects on why this environment maintains such a spell over him in adulthood, a spell which is symbolized by the tantalizing and "wholly native smell" of wolf willow (p. 18). The reason for this, he determines, is simply the enduring imprint of environment on personality:

> Expose a child to a particular environment at his susceptible time and he will perceive in the shapes of that environment until he dies. (p. 21)

This view is not new, of course, but is eloquently defined by Stegner in the context of his pilgrimage to the Cypress Hills. He identifies two variations of the environment's imprint on him, variations determined by the dual landscape of his youth. The Great Plains, with their total sky, wind, dryness and drab browns, mean *exposure*, and thus self-knowledge, identity. On the other hand, the green river valley--closed in and protected from the wind--means *shelter*, sanctuary, safety. In spite of the fact that he has been a city-dweller most of his adult life, Stegner understands that he is truly a product of the earth. Much of what he is--his values, weaknesses, virtues, his code for living--was scored into him "by that little womb-village and the lovely, lonely, exposed prairie of the homestead" (p. 23). Like Max Braithwaite, he scoffs at the educational system which is so out of tune with the environment, which superimposes an irrelevant European culture on the simplicities of frontier life. Stegner grew up in a milieu without a culture, one which provided him with "a childhood of freedom and the outdoors and the senses" (p. 25). One may conclude that this golden age of closeness to the environment must have nurtured Stegner's imagination and thus contributed to the making of an artist.

There is much more, of course, to *Wolf Willow* than this brief discourse on environment, childhood and memory. In the lengthy second section Stegner brings to life the true history of the Cypress Hills region, beginning with the "first look" of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805, up to the climax and end of the Plains as an ecological unit and as the location of a native Indian culture. Throughout, Stegner touches upon the impact of environment on explorer, settler, Indian and retreating Métis. In a short chapter he carefully explains the unusual and specialized ecology of the Cypress Hills, a result of their "accident of elevation" on the Plains (p. 44). He discusses the Hills as the last refuge of Plains wildlife and, tragically, of the Indians and Métis who depended on the buffalo for survival. A measure of Stegner's insight into history is his fascinating account of the well-planned and successful trek by surveyors along the 49th parallel in western Canada. Interestingly, it is the ill-starred march of the Mounted Police in

1874 which has become folklore, while the surveyors' earlier, more successful journey over virtually the same territory is largely ignored.

The two works of fiction in *Wolf Willow*, "Genesis" and "Carrion Spring," are its most remarkable achievement. They are excellent stories which explore both human and historical truth, and they are absorbing to read. "Genesis," which is long enough to be classified as a novella, is the beautiful, lyrical, frightening story of men against the forces of nature in the infamous winter of 1906-07. The main character, Rusty Cullen, is a greenhorn Englishman who becomes a cowboy on the Saskatchewan Plains and is intent on adventure in the grand style. His romantic adventure turns to a desperate struggle for survival during a late fall roundup of cattle, as he and seven other men battle through blizzard after blizzard to safety, eventually having to abandon the cattle they have set out to herd. Rusty learns the meaning of individual strength, of devotion to duty, of straining the outermost limits of endurance and will. In essence, he learns what it is to be an adult: that maturity is not bound up in heroics, but in perseverance and hard slogging and subordination of self.

The Plains environment is presented as immensely hostile and indifferent to the efforts of men who seem pitifully feeble against the powers of wind, empty prairie, blizzard, snow, bitter cold. On the bleak Plains, Rusty develops feelings of nakedness, exposure, smallness, where previously he had been dazzled by the land's grandeur. His feelings give way to paranoia and a sullen hatred of an environment which is, like the wind, "heartless and inhuman" (p. 203). He determines that the only human answer to the challenge of the Plains is "to be invincibly strong..., to depend on no one, to contain within himself every strength and every skill"

(p. 164). The eight men struggling to round up several hundred range cattle appear at once valiant and pathetic, as their every achievement is destroyed by a succession of fierce storms. Rusty feels bitterness that "the devoted and herculean labors of eight good men should be thwarted by a blind force of nature, a meteorological freak, a mere condition of wind and cold" (p. 190). Yet he also is furious at the human foolishness which has dared this hostile environment and failed. In all, the story is reminiscent of that classic of English literature, Joseph Conrad's *Youth*, in its study of maturation achieved through the relentless struggle with natural forces. The companion story to "Genesis," "Carrion Spring," tells of the terrible results of that winter which killed most of the range cattle, destroyed the will and the hope of settlers, and hastened the transition of this region from cattle range to farmland.

Ironically, the jacket cover of the Viking edition praises *Wolf Willow* as an "absorbing contribution to Americana." It is time that Canadian readers recognized that this work is possibly the greatest achievement in Plains literature--a sensitive, moving and honest exploration of a difficult environment and its people.

Symons, R. D. *Many Trails*. Don Mills, Ontario: Longmans, 1963.

In this work Symons tells of the various "life-trails" he has followed since he first came to western Canada as a young boy. Although the book is autobiographical, it does not present a continuous or particularly detailed life-story, but rather five separate accounts of Symons' experiences with the people and environment of five different regions. The entire work--to which the author's own perceptive drawings contribute a great deal--reveals Symons' love for the natural environment and his admiration for the Indians, whom he saw as uniquely in tune with nature.

In the section entitled "Cattle Trails" (pp. 14-59), Symons tells of his early days on a ranch in the Cypress Hills area of southwest Saskatchewan, and describes the land and its plant and animal life with authority and devotion. In a section entitled "Homestead Trails" (pp. 88-127) , Symons also writes of his efforts at homesteading in the Eagle Hills area west of Saskatoon. His homestead was deliberately located not on the "bald-headed" Plains, but on open, rolling prairie with a nearby deeply wooded coulee. One can hardly be surprised at Symons' decision that he was "not cut out for dirt farming," for he seems to have spent as much time observing the small birds and wildlife on his farm as he spent in the work of cultivation. In one passage he tells of his love for sloughs and swamps because of their special ecological balance and the unique forms of bird and plant life which they contain. His sensitive observations and his understanding of the environment make these sections on the Plains area a delight to read.

On the other hand, although Symons' love of nature is evidently very ardent, at times his imposition of a human moral code on the environment is questionable. For example, he implies that there are "good" animals and "bad" animals, with scavengers being in the latter category. In one episode Symons describes his disgust at crows who easily devoured fledgling birds which the author himself had removed from their protective cover while plowing. Nevertheless, Symons does an important service in rejecting environmental attitudes which are based solely on materialism and greed. He is fond of the prairie jack-rabbits and gophers, and especially of the predator coyotes, all of which have been the victims of a much-popularized extermination program in Saskatchewan. Symons makes an eloquent comment on the coyote's terrible plight, and on his adaptability and cunning. The truths which Symons establishes about the coyote are a strong indictment of the cruelty and ignorance of man as the ecological dominant on the Plains.

Many Trails is an interesting and highly significant book, particularly in its sensitive and sympathetic accounts of the environment of western Canada.

R. D. Symons

Photograph by James J. Lisitza

A blustery day, near Martensville

Symons, R. D. *Silton Seasons: From the Diary of a Countryman.*
Toronto: Doubleday, 1975.

Silton Seasons was written in 1965 but not published until two years after the author's death in 1973. The book is a personal memoir of the author's life at Silton and at Pelican Point on Buffalo Pound Lake, Saskatchewan, yet the main subject of the book is as much the Plains environment as it is Symons himself. The most important feature of the work is its wholly positive attitude toward the environment and climate of the Plains. Symons often bitterly condemns the more destructive aspects of "progress" and urbanization; he is unusual in that he views himself as neither a victim nor an exploiter of the natural world.

Symons had retired to the small village of Silton after an active life as a cowboy, game warden, rancher, naturalist, and artist in central Canada. In *Silton Seasons* he tells of the simple joys of the countryman, records his observations of the yearly cycle of life on the plains, and argues with force that Plains society is rapidly destroying the decent way of life of the countryman. He exhibits a passionate love for his natural surroundings in Silton and at Buffalo Pound Lake, and describes intricately how the animal, plant, and bird life around him change with the changing seasons.

Symons' descriptions of the Plains landscape itself are consistently positive and at times sentimental. He says, for example, that there is a bond between "the Sussex downs and the Saskatchewan prairies, between fog-damped moors and the high plateau of the Cypress Hills, which is something more than topographical" (p. 41). Most other English-born Plains writers stress that England has nothing to compare with the great Canadian Plains. But Symons is careful to distinguish between the terms "prairie" and "plain," and says that although the true Plains are treeless, they are not barren, as is commonly thought. He describes their many species of birds, wild flowers, animals and even of edible plants, revealing in the process his obvious love for this environment. Like virtually every other Plains writer, however, he also suggests that he prefers the Saskatchewan hill country to the flat Plains, for in the hills "the upward-sweeping wind gives a buoyancy to our cumbersome bodies and wings to our souls" (p. 42).

Symons has a great respect for the order of ecology, which he views as part of a Divine pattern of life. Man must find his place within the ecological community and must never seek to dominate or to disrupt that community. In many rather emotional essays sprinkled throughout the book, Symons argues against technological progress, the prevailing materialism, urbanization--in fact, against anything which interferes with the ideal of country living. He condemns snowmobiles, power boats, summer cottages, electrical appliances, artificial insemination of cattle, public recreation areas such as parks, the lack of physical exercise among youth, the grisly work of hunters, and the use of poison sprays. The book is only partly descriptive; it is also full of Symons' opinions on almost every facet of a countryman's life. Above all, he deplores the loss of rural values and of a pre-technology rural way of life to the point where he occasionally seems bitter about anything "new." Yet the work is valuable as a naturalist's loving record of the cycle of life on the Plains, and as a commentary on the need for man to accept his role within the Plains environment.

Weekes, Mary Loretto. *The Last Buffalo Hunter. As told to her by Norbert Welsh.* New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1939.

This is the story of Norbert Welsh, a Saskatchewan Metis who is said to have been the last of the buffalo hunters, and thus the last link between the old and the new on the Plains. He saw the buffalo herds when they flourished, then as they dwindled and disappeared; and he also saw the parallel decimation of the Plains Indians who were dependent on the buffalo. His story, straightforward and detached, is probably the most authentic account available of that time.

Welsh speaks with authority of the life and customs of the Plains Cree Indians, and he describes clearly and simply the environmental hazards which he often faced during his journeys. He eventually came to hate the terrible waste of buffalo slaughtered only for their hides; in one episode, he describes how his wife refused to dress a hide which was brought in without a carcass.

A period of only 16 years spanned the time from Welsh's first buffalo hunt, in 1862, to the virtual end of the great herds on the Plains. Welsh's life--like the lives of so many others--changed forever with the disappearance of the buffalo.

Supplementary Bibliography: Biography and Memoir

Anahareo. *My Life with Grey Owl.* Toronto: Saunders, 1940.
A biography of the famous conservationist and writer by his young Indian wife.

Bock, William G. *The Book of Humbug.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1958.
Humorous verse and anecdotes based on life on a new farm near Eastend, Saskatchewan (the driest part of the Palliser Triangle), and on personal experiences in social and political life. The work includes sketches, ballads and a "fantasy" which is a satire on prairie politics in the 1930's.

Bock, William G. *The Book of Skeletons.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1960.
Delightful sketches and anecdotes from Bock's own life, as well as some of his ballads. The work shows how he coped with homesteading near Eastend, Saskatchewan--through perseverance, hard work and a sense of humour.

Braithwaite, Max. *Never Sleep Three in a Bed.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967
The author gives an exuberant account of his boyhood on the Canadian prairies. One of a larger family, Max was brought up in various Saskatchewan towns during the first quarter of the century. As he suggested, "once a prairie boy always a prairie boy and one supposed being a prairie boy is a very good thing indeed!" The usual boyhood pranks and diversions are recounted in this delightful autobiography. (P.L. 71)

Dickson, Horatio Henry Lovat. *Half Breed: The Story of Grey Owl.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1939.

A biography of the nature lover and conservationist who spent the last seven years of his life in Saskatchewan. (P.L. 71)

Flaws, E. G. *Memoirs of the Kid from Saskatchewan.* Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1968.

An exuberant autobiography which attempts to demonstrate and to prescribe, humourously, the ground rules for a successful and vigorous life. Part I includes descriptions of life in a small Saskatchewan town in the early 1900's and is full of exaggerated comparisons: "we were so poor that...," "it was so cold that...," etc. It seems that the author's boyhood adventures served to compensate for his uninspiring surroundings. In Part II, he leaves Saskatchewan to seek his fortune in the U. S. A.

Grayson, Ethel Kirk. *Unbind the Sheaves.* Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1964.

Modern-day reminiscences of life in Saskatchewan. (P.L. 71)

Grey Owl. *Pilgrims of the Wild.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1934.

An autobiography. The story of the transformation of Grey Owl from a hunter of the beaver to an ardent champion of their preservation. (P.L. 71)

Kurelek, William. *A Prairie Boy's Summer: Paintings and Story by Wm. Kurelek.* Montreal: Tundra Books, 1975.

In this companion volume to his award-winning *A Prairie Boy's Winter*, Kurelek again returns to his prairie boyhood to describe in 20 magnificent paintings and an honest, vivid text what those summers in the Thirties were like for him. Kurelek's

love of life and of the vast expanse of the Plains is ever-present throughout his words and paintings.

Kurelek, William *A Prairie Boy's Winter: Paintings and Story by William Kurelek*. Montreal: Tundra Books, 1973.
Both in words and in twenty full-colour paintings, this wonderful, simple book tells the story of Kurelek's childhood on the Plains in winter. The images trace the beauty and harshness of the environment, from the flight of crows leaving for the winter, to games in snow and on ice, unique winter chores, treacherous blizzards, to the first signs of spring. A sensitive and loving book.

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A memoir of growing up Jewish in small towns in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Adapted for a CBC-TV production in 1975.

Moon, Robert James. *This is Saskatchewan*. Toronto: Ryerson, 1953.
A journalist's impressions of contemporary Saskatchewan. (P.L. 71)

Parsons, Nell Wilson. *Upon a Sagebrush Harp*. Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1969.

The author came to Canada from Iowa with her English-born parents in 1907. This is a true story in which the author, Mrs. Parsons, describes the family's journey through the prairie winter and also the year of hardships the family had to face in the new land. The author brings to life the early pioneer days. (P.L. 71)

Tibbets, Ethel C. *On to the Sunset*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1953.

Pioneer life in the western provinces, based on experiences of the author's family and friends.

Tyre, Robert. *Saddlebag Surgeon: The Story of Murrough O'Brien, M.D.* Toronto: Dent, 1954.

A biography of a country doctor, Dr. Murrough O'Brien, who practised for over fifty years at various points in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. (P.L. 71)

Van Dusen, T. *Chief*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1968.

A biography of John G. Diefenbaker, who spent his childhood on a homestead near Prince Albert.

Woodcock, George. *Gabriel Dumont: The Métis Chief and his Lost World*. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975.

A full-scale portrait of the greatest of Métis hunters and the guerilla chief of Louis Riel's followers. Dumont himself not only had all the qualities of a great folk hero, but he was probably more truly representative than Riel of the Métis people who struggled hopelessly to retain their free and nomadic way of life on the Plains. Woodcock also studies the devastating environmental changes which led to the destruction of the Métis nation.

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